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# Kinnaur

*Unfolding Exotic Himalayan Land*

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# Kinnaur

*Unfolding Exotic Himalayan Land*

O.C. Handa



**I N D U S**  
PUBLISHING COMPANY



915.452

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INDUS PUBLISHING COMPANY  
FS-5, Tagore Garden, New Delhi-110027  
Tel.: 42133022, 42133622, 25151333  
induspubco@gmail.com  
www.indus-publishing.com

**A.P. Secretariat Library**

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Acc. No. .... 30977

ISBN 978-81-7387-223-5

Price ₹ 600/-

Source Minerva

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Published by M.L. Gidwani for Indus Publishing Company,  
New Delhi. Printed at Chaman Enterprises, New Delhi

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## PREFACE

Kinnaur has been the cynosure of all eyes and thoughts from the earliest times of the Indian civilisation. Right from the classical age to our times, the fabled land of Kinnaur and its charismatic inhabitants have figured variously in literature. In fact, the people of the mainland had very confusing and fantastic idea about the inhabitants of this mountainous region. They defined them as the 'Kinnars' to suggest that they were not certain about their real identity as men (human beings) or the celestial beings. Those highlanders were even portrayed as the half-human-half-bird. That type of belief lingered on for several centuries onwards. Even in the *Rajatarangini*, we find the same confusion persisting.

However, during the pre-modern colonial times, the mist over this land was considerably removed. Many western explorers and travellers ventured into this area with different objectives. They extensively travelled over the interior of this exotic country and wrote extensively about it. However, in most of those works, this land was defined as the terra incognita. Nevertheless, the accounts left by them are very valuable and authentic.

Paradoxically though, during the modern times, i.e., post-independence decades, this area was made reasonably accessible to the outsiders, yet very few dared to venture into this 'terra incognita'. Even the state government employees were scared to go there despite several social benefits offered to them. Rahul Sankrityayan was the first to visit this area in the modern times.

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He extensively travelled, rather walked, in this area in the early days of 1948. At that time, nothing of the modern facility was available beyond Shimla, and one was expected to subsist on improvisation. His *Kinnaur Desh Main* is the first authentic work on Kinnaur and its people. After him, many scholars have written on Kinnaur, but most of them have relied on self-experienced accounts of the earlier explorers and writers. Nevertheless, Banshi Ram Sharma travelled this area extensively for his doctoral work *Kinnar Lok Sahitya* (1976), and Deepak Sanan & Dhanu Swadi explored Kinnaur area and brought out excellent book *Exploring Kinnaur & Spiti in the Trans-Himalaya* (1998).

I have been extensively travelling in this area and the adjoining trans-Himalayan interiors now for more than ten decades on various exploratory missions, and have written extensively on the art, architecture and many other aspects related to the western Himalayan interiors. However, despite the fact that I had accumulated huge field data on Kinnaur, extensively photographed the land and its people and made several drawings and sketches, it never occurred to me that I should do something exclusively on Kinnaur. It was only after my friend, Mr. M.L. Gidwani, proprietor of Indus Publishing Company, New Delhi suggested that I should do a book on Kinnaur for him. I appreciated his suggestion and started working on it. What I accomplished is now before you. I have tried to cover almost every aspect of the land and life of Kinnaur as I have personally experienced it during my innumerable visits. This is a fascinating land inhabited by the equally fascinating people. I hope the readers shall find the book informative and interesting.

The book is divided into thirteen chapters. In these chapters, not only the geography, history, religious beliefs, socio-cultural and family setup, dress manners, festivals, folklore, arts and crafts, archaeology, etc. have been discussed in detail, but also the problem of identity of the inhabitants of this region and the apprehensions from the exploitive market culture and corporate system for the traditional lifestyle have also been highlighted in right earnest.

I wish and hope that this work may inspire the professionals, researchers and scholars for deeper study on various aspects of this region, for there exists huge source material scattered in the

traditions, folklore and belief-systems of the people here. For the anthropological and sociological researchers, it is a veritable paradise. My objective in the present work has essentially been to evoke interest and discussion among those who may be in a better position to work on various aspects of this fascinating region.

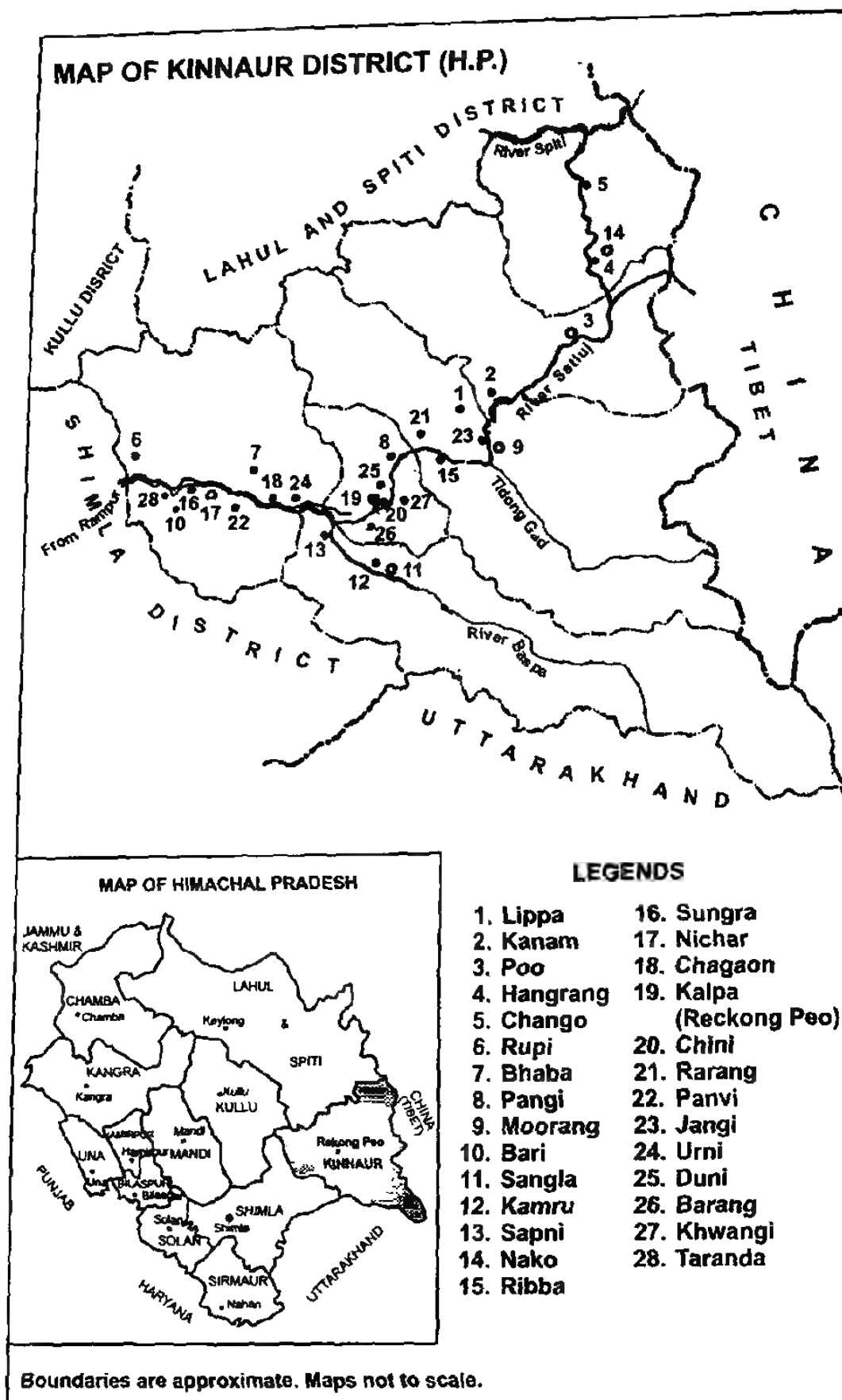
For quite sometime now, I have been feeling strongly about the way in which most of the classical Indian words have incorrectly been pronounced by the people throughout the world. The reason for that incorrect pronunciation may be found in the incorrect manner of spelling those words. Thus, Ram has been distorted to be spelled as *Rama*, Yog as *Yoga*, Krishn and *Krishna*, Buddh as *Buddha*, and Himalay as *Himalayas* and so on. There is dire need to correct this blasphemous legacy of the colonial times so that the Indian classical words are properly spelled, pronounced and understood. I have made an attempt to rectify that fault without using diacritical marks and symbols in this book. I hope, this effort shall be appreciated and followed by the conscientious readers.

### Acknowledgements

I am deeply beholden to my friend T.C. Negi of Chini (Kalpa) for having provided me valuable information on various little-known aspects of Kinnauri culture. He also provided some good photographs. He and Shekhar Bisht gave me very useful company during my visits to several places in Kinnaur. I also express my thanks to my friend, C.L. Kashyap for the photographs supplied by him. I am grateful to my friend, M.L. Gidwani. This book could not have been possible, that too in the shortest possible time, but for his constant urging. He also deserves my sincere appreciation for the speedy publication of this book in such a beautiful form.

I must record my appreciation to my grandchildren Divya, Sanyam and Mrinal, who contributed their bit to help me out in finding solution to my numerous computer problems to my great relief. Last but not the least, I am sincerely beholden to all the members of my family, especially to my wife Ganga, who, as usual, supported and encouraged me to complete this work.

O.C. HANDA



# 1

## INTRODUCTION

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### THE KINNAR AND THE KINNAURA

During the recent past, an intense controversy had started regarding the word 'Kinnar' being used in several modern works to define the present-day traditional inhabitants of Kinnaur, which traditionally was known as *Khunu*. Therefore, it is appropriate to clarify my position about this contentious topic in the beginning. We frequently come across the term 'Kinnar' in the Indian classical literature, where they have been defined in several fantastic and imaginary allegories and cognomens, as the *Kimpurush*, *Ashvamukh*, *Deerghavenik*, etc. Each of these cognomens refers to one of their physical peculiarities. While *Kinnar* and *Kimpurush* are synonymous terms, which allegedly mean to represent persons of doubtful masculinity. The *Ashvamukh* signifies a person having the head of a horse on a human body. He is said to be the musician of Kuber. The *Deerghavenik* represents a person supporting long braided hair.

Nothing is known specifically about the abode of those mythical beings, but by a vague conjecture they are located somewhere in the Himalay in the neighbourhood of the Khash and Gandharv territories, which too are very vaguely defined.<sup>1</sup> In the *Vayupuran*, the *Kinnar* are mentioned as the inhabitants of *Mahaneel Parvat*, which may suggestively refer to Himalay; according to the *Matsyapurāṇa*<sup>2</sup> and *Garudpurāṇa*,<sup>3</sup> they are located in the northeast. In the



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*Mahabharat*, there is reference to the country of *Kimpurush*, being guarded by the sons of Drum *kimpurushavasam drumputren rakshitam*.<sup>4</sup> Drum literally means a tree, and the *drumputren* or sons of Drum may imply the forest dwellers. Drum is also another name of Kuber. How come that the abode of *Kimpurush* was guarded by the sons of Drum? Were the *Kimpurush* too docile and debile to defend themselves, or they were too prosperous that they could afford to maintain a fighting force for their security? Whatever may be the case, such *Kimpurush* certainly cannot be the ancestors of the present-day Kinnauras, for, none of those traits are historically tenable. What is further intriguing is the fact that the *Kinnars* are conspicuously missing in the context.

Therefore, the oft-repeated identity of the *Kinnar* with *Kimpurush* based on this reference is questionable. This distinction becomes further clear from the *Bhagwatpuran*, wherein the *Kimpurush* and *Kinnar* are distinguished apart – *sa kinnaran kimburushan pratyatmyena srijatprabhuh . . .*<sup>5</sup> In the *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, the *Kinnar* and *Kimpurush* are clearly distinguished apart. It states, while the *Kinnars* have horse-like face, the *Kimpurush*, like the Centaur of Greek mythology, have horse-like body.<sup>6</sup> It is also implied in some *Purans* that Ila-Sudyumn, one of the ten sons of Manu, was a *kimpurush*.<sup>7</sup>

Another term used to define the Kinnaura ancestry is the *Deerghavenik*, but the *Deerghavenik*, clubbed with the *Khash*, *Jhash*, *Nadyot*, *Praghas*, *Pashup*, *Kulind*, *Tangan*, *Partangan*, etc., are clearly specified apart from *Kimpurush* in the *Mahabharat*.<sup>8</sup> Then comes the term *Ashvamukh*, used to define the present-day Kinnaura: quoting K.M. Munshi, Sharma says, "The Kinnauras are different from the *Khash*. Their faces are horse-like elongated. On the eve of Baisakhi, when they perform group-dances, each of the *Kinnar* dons a horse mask."<sup>9</sup> In the *Rajatarangini*, "Kinnara literally 'part human' is a name of a Gandharv. The Kinnara had a human body with the face of the horse, the reverse of Centaur."<sup>10</sup> Incidentally, *Kinnar*, son of *Vibhishan*, was one of the kings of Kashmir.<sup>11</sup> This is plainly not correct. The Kinnauras neither have horse-like elongated face nor the wearing of such a mask has been a customary practice with them.

While the *Kimpurush* were confined to a specific territory beyond

the Dhavalgiri (*shvetparvatam*)<sup>12</sup>, the *Kinnar* were well-spread in the Himalayan interiors. Rahul even goes to the extent of saying that “originally the entire Himalay was the *Kinnar* country.”<sup>13</sup> Therefore, it may be incorrect to consider both these terms – *Kimpurush* and *Kinnar* – as synonymous.

All those apocryphal and fictional references lead us to believe that those celestial bards (Tib.: *mi-'am-c'i*) had been the mythical beings of the poetic imagery, given to the singing and dancing, in the classical literature. The *Deerghavenik* are unrelated to the *Kimpurush* even in *Mahabharat*, and so is the term *Ashvamukh* irrelevant to the present-day traditional inhabitants of Kinnaur. Then, how did this confusion start, is a point to ponder upon. We do not find the present-day traditional inhabitants of Kinnaur being identified with the mythical *Kimpurush*, *Kinnar*, *Ashvamukh*, *Deerghavenik*, etc. in any of the pre-modern colonial writings, not even in the gazetteers. Interestingly, the *Kinnar* or *Kimpurush* does not appear among the historical ancient communities in the *Tribes of Ancient India*<sup>14</sup> to affirm the fact that they were not the historical people.

Then, does it imply that nothing like the *Kimpurush*, *Kinnar* or *Deerghavenik* ever lived in the Himalayan interiors, and what has been said in the classical Indian literature is all myth? No, certainly not: even the mythology and folk traditions have truth and realism in the core. The Khash and Kirat (the Sino-Tibetan speaking people of the Mongolian stock) had been living separately in the vast mountainous Himalayan tract: the Khash dominating over the cis-Himalayan tract and the Kirat inhabiting the trans-Himalayan plateaus since the earliest times. They, defined as the *ganrajyas* in the classical texts, lived in different sequestered localities, separated by the vast wild stretches, deep gorges and high mountain ranges. We come across various instances and traditions of the love-n-hate relationship between these two ethnicities. We shall be discussing some of those aspects in the following chapters. While, the broad aspects of the lifestyle of each of those two ethnic communities were similar under the overall Himalayan geo-climatic conditions, the secluded living in different localities imparted certain local peculiarities that also made them stand apart from each other. Thus, the Pangwals, Kulluvi, Bushahri,

Sirmauri, Jaunsari, etc. are the different generic identities, but all belong to the same Khash ethnic stock.

The high snow-covered ranges of the Great Divide were the insurmountable barrier for the inter-racial intercourse in most of the Himalayan interior, and it was only in the upper Satluj valley, where the Satluj cuts through the Great Himalayan range, that the Khash and Kirat could communicate and interact with each other easily and, thus, imbibe influences from each other to give them a distinct generic identity. Another example of similar geo-ethnic interfusion is the Lahul valley beyond Rohtang-la.

Therefore, what we find in the Indian classical traditions may not be total fiction, but the metaphoric expression of the generic peculiarities of Khash living in the upper Satluj valley, who came to be known as the *Kinnar*. Similarly, the *Kimpurush* and the *Deerghavenik* may also be the different generic identities on the authority of *Mahabharat*. Mixing and confusing them together may not be reasonable. The terms *Kinnar* and *Kimpurush*, referring to the different generic communities, do not indicate 'a person of doubtful masculinity', but it establishes the fact that the mainlanders lacked factual knowledge about the Himalayan highlanders: whether they are men (human beings) or the celestial beings. In fact, mythical *Kinnars* have been represented not as the human beings, but as the half-human-half-bird.<sup>15</sup> Interpreting these classical terms this way seems logical, for most of what is said about those people in the classical literature may be hyperbolic and imaginary narration. In the *Sabhaparv*,<sup>16</sup> they are identified with the Chins – the present-day warring community, the Shins of Gilgit. The word *deerghavenik* used in the *Mahabharat*<sup>17</sup> is also probably meant to define them as the people who supported a long braided tail of hair. That peculiarity may still be noted among many of them, especially among the Bon-pas – the adherents of the Bon cult – in the upper Kinnaur and rest of the trans-Himalayan region, where the Kirat population predominate. They are the pre-Buddhist and non-Buddhist inhabitants of Ladakh, Spiti and upper Kinnaur, who still follow the pre-Buddhist Bon cult. Even today, the non-Buddhist Kirats are the *Deerghavenik*.

In the upper part of Kinnaur, the Kirat element still predominates. Thus, we find two ethnic communities living side by side

in the upper Satluj valley – the modern Kinnaur – during the classical period: the Kinnar-Khash and the Kirat. Therefore, it may not be proper to define the present-day Kinnaur as *Kinnardesh*, for it is a homeland not only for the Kinnar, but also for the Kirat. Nevertheless, the modern writings on Kinnaur right from Rahul Sankrityayan's *Kinnar Desh Main* onwards, with a very few exceptions, are replete with such references wherein facts and fictions and history and mythology have been mixed together.

Broadly speaking, the present-day traditional inhabitants belong to the two distinct ethnic groups – the Khash and the Kirat. While, the lower part of Kinnaur is dominated by the Khash element, the upper one is populated by the Kirats, and in between, we find the blend of the two. In fact, the higher caste people define themselves as the *Khoshia*, i.e., Khash in Kinnaur.<sup>18</sup> This aspect has been discussed in detail in the following chapters. Besides, some families of the caste Hindus had also settled in Sangla valley and other places in Kinnaur during the medieval past. However, none of them are Brahmins. Having remained drawn away from their parent stock for centuries, those settlers have lost their inherited caste base, and have fallen in line with the socio-cultural environment of the land of their refuge.

Kinnaur has traditionally been known as the *Kanoring*, *Kinoring* by the local people and as *Khunu* by the Bhots. In the modern context, it may not be reasonable to define the traditional inhabitants of Kinnaur – the Kinnauras – as the mythological *Kinnar* or *Deerghavenik*. Kinnaura is a generic term that represents the people of different ethnicities, who have traditionally been living in Kinnaur. And, I stand corrected on this account (for I too have used Kinnar and Kinnaura synonymously in my earlier works), until it is proved otherwise by further research.

## THE LOCALE

A glance on the physical map of India would reveal that on the north, the Himalay is spread like a gigantic crescent between the Nanga Parvat peak on the west and the Namcha Barwa in the east, and the whole system is southwesterly oriented. This feature is more distinct towards the western segment, where the Himalay



Gateway to Kinnaur.

is at its widest. Bounded by the Indus river on the west and the Tons-Yamuna gorge on the east, this mountainous region is popularly known as the Western Himalayan region. Situated in the northeastern part of Himachal Pradesh between  $31^{\circ} 05' 50''$  and  $32^{\circ} 05' 15''$  North latitude and  $77^{\circ} 45'$  and  $79^{\circ} 00' 35''$  East longitude, Kinnaur is spread on both the banks of Satluj (the *Shatadru* of the classical literature) around its head-reaches in the Indian territory from northeast to southwest over the rugged area that approximately measures 80 kilometres in length and 65 kilometres in width. However, the habitable stretches, located on higher gentler slopes on both sides of the Satluj gorge and in the side valleys, hardly exceed 13 kilometres. This high altitude mountainous district is divided into two almost equal halves by the Satluj, which enters it from northeast and, gushing forth turbulently almost parallel to its northern boundary, leaves it at the southwestern end, dropping almost 2,000 metres in about 130 kilometres length. Forming the northeastern border district of Himachal Pradesh, Kinnaur is one of its 12 districts.

Located strategically deep in the Satluj basin, Kinnaur demarcates a well-defined natural international boundary between India and Tibet (China) towards the east. Towards the southeast, it is



Hindustan-Tibet road through half-tunnelling at Taranda (above)  
and H.T. road through perilous rock mass (below).

separated from the Uttarkashi district of Uttarakhand by the glacial heights of the Yamunotri-Gangotri massifs. Towards the southwest of it is the Shimla district and on the northwest are the districts of Kullu and Lahul & Spiti. Spread on both sides of the Great Himalay range that traverses it from northwest to southeast, it is one of the interior districts of the state, well-connected by an all-weather National Highway No. 22, popularly known as the Hindustan-Tibet road, that traverses the district from one end to the other. Besides, a good network of roads, connecting most of the villages, exists within the district.

Two distinct ethno-religious strains may be identified in two geo-ethnically different segments, demarcated broadly by the Pangi Nala next to village Telangi. Northeast of that nullah in the trans-Himalayan upper Kinnaur. Majority of people in this segment follow the Himalayan Buddhism introduced from Tibet, with the sprinkling of people adhering to the pre-Buddhist cults. Those cults predominated the vast mountainous tract on both sides of the Great Divide before the advent of classical faith systems – Buddhist and Brahmanical – from the Indian mainland. Those primitive cult-systems have vaguely been defined as the Bon. In the cis-Himalayan lower Kinnaur southwest of Pangi Nala, the people follow various native cults centered on the *Nagas*, *Narains* and *Maishur*, laced with the Brahmanical practices.

This geo-ethnic diversity and the religio-cultural montage have made Kinnaur a veritable paradise for the anthropologists, sociologists and scholars of all disciplines. Therefore, it is with good reason that since the earliest times of the colonial period (may be even before that) scholars, explorers, trekkers, hunters and the people of other persuasions have been coming to this Shangri-La from all sides. Precisely little is known about the visitors to this exotic land until we come down to the beginning of nineteenth century. From the incidental and cursory mentions in the classical and pre-colonial literature, one gets only a very vague and hazy picture that evokes nostalgic curiosity about this *terra incognita* and its fabled inhabitants. In the following chapters, all those classical literary contexts and the popular traditions have been brought out and appropriately examined. Here, it may be of interest to review what has been written about this region since the colonial period.

## LITERARY REVIEW

James Baillie Fraser's account of CE 1814-1815, *Journal of Tour through Part of the Snowy Ranges of the Himala Mountains and to the Sources of the River Jamna and Ganges* (London, 1820) is an important work for the details of land and people of this region around Rampur Bushahr. The Indian addition (New Delhi) of this book was published in 1982 as *The Himala Mountains*. This is an important work on the Shimla Hill States and part of Uttarakhand, but his observations about Kinnaur are just cursory.

Captain Alexander Gerard was perhaps the first European to visit Kinnaur in CE 1817. His *Account of Koonawar in the Himalaya* (London, 1841) is a valuable monograph on the upper Kinnaur and the adjoining Spiti valley. So is his *Narrative of Journey from Counpoor to Borendo Pass in the Himalayan Mountains* (London, 1840), which he wrote jointly with William Lloyd.

We also come across 'An Account of a tour made to lay down the course and levels of the river Sutlej or Satudara as far as traceable within the limits of the British Authority performed in 1819 CE' in the *Asiatic Researches*, Vol. XV, 1825.

Josiah Conder's *Modern Travellers: A Destination of the Various Countries of the Globe* (London 1829) has covered Kinnaur (along with Sirmaur, Jubbal and Bushahr) in the 11<sup>th</sup> volume of the 33-volume compilation.

Captain Alexander Gerard's 'Travel in the Himalayan Country (Kinnaur District)' appeared in the *Selection from the Asiatic Journal and Annual Register for British India and its Dependencies*, Vol. XIV to XXVIII, July 1822 to December 1829 (Madras, 1875).

Nevertheless, it is William Moorcroft and George Trebeck's *Travels in the Himalayan Provinces of Hindustan and Punjab* (London, 1837), which vividly unfolds the diverse facets of this region that they happened to observe during their disguised odyssey between CE 1819 and 1825.

Victor Jacquemont undertook a socio-cultural study of Kinnaur and adjoining areas in Sirmaur, Shimla Hills from 1829 to 1831. He produced a fascinating book – *Letters from India describing a Journey in the British Dominions of India, Tibet and Cashmere during the years 1829, 1830, 1831* (tr. from the French in two volumes),



(London, 1834). He produced another book – *Letters from India, 1829-1832, being a Selection from the Correspondence of Victor Jacquemont* (tr. from the French), (London, 1836), in which he has recorded his experiences of the tour from Nahan to Kinnaur.

Thomas Hutton's 'Journal of a trip on the Burendo Pass in 1836' that appeared in the *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Vol. VI, 1837 is interesting for the geographical information about that little known area. He also recorded the geomorphologic data in his 'Journal of the trip through Hungrung, Kanawur and Spiti undertaken in the year 1838 under the patronage of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, for the purpose of determining the geological frontiers of these districts' that appeared in the *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Vols. VII, 1839; IX, 1840 and X, 1841.

Joseph Devi Cunningham published his 'Notes on Moorcroft's Travels in Ladakh and on the Gerard's Account of Kunawar including the general description of the latter district' in the *Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Vol. XIII, No. 1 & No. 3 (Calcutta, 1844).

Based on his exploration between CE 1847 and 1848, Thomas Thomson produced *Western Himalayas and Tibet* (London, 1852). It contains valuable data on archaeology, history and flora-culture of that region, which is relevant to the trans-Himalayan Kinnaur as well.

Alexander Cunningham's *Ladak, Physical Statistical and Historical with notices of the surrounding countries* (London, 1854) is an important and informative work, in which he has discussed 'Kanawar' region and the 'Cataclysm of the Sutlej' in detail besides the other adjoining area and rivers.

Philip Henry Egerton's *Journal of Tour through Spiti to the Frontier of Chinese Tibet* (London, 1864) is also an informative travelogue on Kinnaur and Spiti.

Mrs. Ansley J.C. Murray's *An Account of a Three Months Tour from Simla through Bussahir Kunawar and Spiti to Lahaul* (Calcutta, 1882) is also an interesting work on the nature and life of inner and trans-Himalayan regions.

Similarly, C.F. Gordon Cumming's *In the Himalayas and the Indian Plains* (London, 1886) presents a bird's eye view on Kinnaur.

Gordon W.F. Forbes also explored some part of Kinnaur in his

*From Simla to Shipki in Chinese Thibet, an Itinerary of the Routes and Various Minor Routes with a few hints to Travellers, and Sketch Map* (Calcutta, 1893).

Besides the aforementioned travelogues, the 19<sup>th</sup> century is also marked by some of the most outstanding and incisive researches by some of the greatest explorer-scholars of our time. Hungarian scholar Alexander Csoma de Koros lived in extreme privation in Zaskar in the eastern Ladakh and Kanam in Kinnaur to research on the history of Western Tibet (*Ngari-Korsum*). His pioneering service to the cause of knowledge was acknowledged by the Asiatic Society of Bengal in the following words inscribed on the memorial stone over his grave at Darjeeling: “. . . and after years passed under privation, such have seldom endured, and patient labour in the cause of Science compiled a Dictionary and Grammar of the Tibetan language, his best and real monument. On his road to Lassa, to resume his labour, he died in this place, on the 11th April, 1842.”

In his *The Abode of Snow* (London, 1875), Andrew Wilson has devoted twelve chapters comprising 106 pages. He provides valuable first-hand glimpses of Kinnaur.

With the rise of 20<sup>th</sup> century, many eminent scholars and explorers undertook serious and incisive studies on almost all conceivable aspects of this region. It would be beyond the scope of the present study to discuss all those works. However, topical works are briefly discussed.

The foremost among the 20<sup>th</sup> century scholars was Dr. A.H. Francke. His *Antiquities of Indian Tibet*, in two volumes (Calcutta, 1914, 1926) is singularly the most outstanding work on the history and archaeology of this region, including Kinnaur. Francke's another work: *A History of Western Tibet* (London, 1907) also contains valuable information on Kinnaur.

Sven Hedin's *Trans-Himalaya – Discoveries and Adventures in Tibet* in three volumes (London, 1909) is a very informative work on the geomorphology. However, he has discussed many other topics of life and culture of the trans-Himalayan region. He has discussed Kinnaur in the second volume.

W.G.N. Van Der Sleen's *Four Month's Camping in the Himalayas*,

(tr. from Dutch), (London, 1929) is also an important work on the geology and botany of the area.

Hugh Whistler's *In the High Himalayas* (London, 1924) and Kenneth Mason's *Routes in the Western Himalaya* (Calcutta, 1931) are two other interesting works of informative nature.

Giuseppe Tucci's monumental and varied contributions on the art, culture and history of Tibet have eclipsed all the previous works on the Himalayan Buddhism. In the third volume of *Indo-Tibetica*, (Roma, 1932-41), he has covered 'Spiti and Kunavar'.

After India attained independence, security of the western Himalayan region assumed priority due to the Indo-Pakistan border dispute. The curtains drew further down in 1962, when a boundary conflict between India and China accentuated the strategic importance of this region and entry to the 'inner-line' was restricted. All those factors frustrated any serious study on this region. Obviously, no substantial work could come out in the post-independence period for quite sometime until the restrictions were relaxed.

Nevertheless, Rahul Sankrityayan undertook extensive touring of Kinnaur and wrote *Kinnar Desh Main* (Allahabad, 1948, reprint 1998), in which he not only recorded his first-hand impressions of the area, but also probed thoroughly and closely the socio-cultural environment of the area. In fact, Rahul's *Kinnar Desh Main* pioneered an era of academic research on Kinnaur. Most of the subsequent scholars relied heavily on his work for their writings on Kinnaur, notwithstanding the fact that some of the observations of Rahul in *Kinnar Desh Main* are questionable. Ramkrishan Kaushal's work *Kamaneeya Kinnaur* (Solan, 1963) is one of such study.

Ram Rahul's *Himalayan Borderland* (New Delhi, 1970) is an important work, which has covered Kinnaur and surrounding trans-Himalayan districts in a wholesome manner.

Mentions may be made of an interesting paper, 'Ethnomusicology of Kinnaur' by I.E.N. Chauhan that appeared in *Sangeet Natak India* in its January-March issue of 1972.

*Ladakh and Western Himalayan Politics* by C.L. Dutta (Delhi, 1973) is a very fascinating study on the history of trade relations between

India and Tibet. Sufficient material is available in this book on Kinnaur.

Dr. Banshi Ram Sharma's *Kinnar Lok-Sahitya* (Bilaspur, 1976) is an important work on the folklore of Kinnaur. He has done intensive fieldwork for his research thesis. Similarly, S.S. Chib's *Kinnauras of the Trans Himalaya* (New Delhi, 1984) is an interesting research work on the social geography of Kinnaur. S.C. Bajpai, relying heavily on the gazetteers and colonial works, also wrote *Kinnaur – A Remote Land in the Himalaya* (New Delhi, 1991). V. Verma's *Kinnauras of Kinnaur* (New Delhi, 2002) is also another work of similar type.

Nevertheless, my friend Harish Kapadia, the renowned mountaineer and explorer, brought some of the magnificent works on the travel, exploration and mountaineering in the western Himalayan region, in which he has covered Kinnaur also. Among these works, mention may be made of the *High Himalaya Unknown Valleys* (Delhi, 1993) and *Meeting the Mountains* (Delhi, 1998). *Exploring Kinnaur & Spiti in the Trans-Himalaya* (Delhi, 1998) by Deepak Sanan & Dhanu Swadi is another interesting and authentic work on high-land trekking in this region.

In 1987 came out my book *Buddhist Monasteries in Himachal Pradesh*, in which a few Buddhist monasteries of Kinnaur have also been discussed in detail. In 2001, my book *Buddhist Western Himalaya, Part I, A Politico-Religious History* was published. In this work, Kinnaur has been discussed in the broader trans-Himalayan socio-cultural and politico-religious context. In the second edition of *Buddhist Monasteries of Himachal* (New Delhi, 2004), all ancient and important Buddhist monasteries of Kinnaur have been discussed in detail. These works were followed by *Woodcarving in the Himalayan Region* (New Delhi, 2006) and *Panorama of Himalayan Architecture: Buddhist Monasteries, Castles & Forts and Traditional Houses*, Vol. II (New Delhi, 2008). In these works, Kinnaur has been specifically represented.

Tashi Chhering Negi's *Kinnari Sabhyata Aur Sahitya* (New Delhi, 2005) is an interesting and intimate study of the folklore and customs of Kinnaur.

Vidyasagar Negi's *The Nomadic Shepherds of North-West Himalaya: In the Context of Kinnaur (A Socio-Cultural Study)* in Hindi (Varanasi,

2007) is a significant, informative, intimate and self-experienced work on the lifestyle of shepherds of Kinnaur.

The Census of India undertook a programme of conducting socio-economic survey of selected villages in each tehsil in the country during the 1961 Census. Accordingly, monographs on Nichar, Kothi and Kanam in Kinnaur district were brought out. These socio-economic studies furnish very useful first-hand information on the area through these representative villages. The Census of India again undertook the socio-economic survey of Kanam in 1981 to bring out the socio-economic and socio-cultural changes between the two surveys, 1961 and 1981. Subsequent Census publications on Kinnaur are also very useful works. These bring out the pattern of demographic changes that have been undergoing in this region under the new socio-cultural awakening.

Kinnaur appeared for the first time in the gazetteers, when the *Imperial Gazetteer of India, Provincial Series, Punjab* (Calcutta, 1907-09) covered Kinnaur as a part of Bushahr State, among the other Shimla and Punjab hill states. Interesting and valuable information on Kinnaur is also available in the *Punjab State Gazetteer, Vol. VIII, Shimla Hill States* (Lahore, 1910) and *Punjab State Gazetteer, Vol. VIII, Part A, Shimla Hill States* (Lahore, 1934). The *District Gazetteer of Kinnaur*, brought out by the District Gazetteers Unit of Government of Himachal Pradesh (Shimla, 1971) furnishes interesting information on Kinnaur district.

The Economics and Statistics Directorate of Himachal Pradesh has also brought out several data-based publications on Kinnaur. Among those, mention may be made of *Facts and Figures of Kinnaur District* (Shimla, 1963), *Planned Progress in Kinnaur District – 1960-61 to 1969-70* (Shimla, 1971) and *An Evaluation Study of Kinnaur* (Shimla, 1972). The *Industrial Potential Survey, Kinnaur District* (Shimla, 1976) published by the Directorate of Industries, Himachal Pradesh is also an informative book.

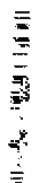
In addition to the aforementioned works, a number of scattered writings of great value belonging to the pre and post-independence periods are available on Kinnaur in many authoritative works on the western Himalayan region and Western Tibet (*Ngari-Korsum*). It may not be practicable to detail all those works here. Besides, a number of books, articles in different magazines and

research papers have appeared during the post-independence decades. Those works are interesting in their own right despite the fact that most of them are of the armchair type writings, based necessarily on the earlier works.

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# 2



## GEOPHYSICAL PANORAMA

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### GENERAL PHYSIOGRAPHY

The endless series of snow-clad mountain ranges soaring high one behind the other, the deep, dark and dreary gorges, and the sweeping stretches of wild pasturing slopes (locally known as *kanda* and as *bugiyal* in Uttarakhand) and plateaus broadly characterise the physiography of Kinnaur. Starting with the thick evergreen coniferous verdure of all description around, as one enters the district at Chaura, the landscape starts turning rugged, rocky and thinner in vegetation as one proceeds upstream in the Satluj gorge. Standing anywhere on the road at the bottom of the gorge, if one stretches his head to see the peak of the mountain range on either side, he has to hold his cap lest it falls backwards: so steep is the mountain profile on both sides.

Further onwards, one confronts the nature at its starkest. The raw geological formation of innumerable hues of grey, yellow, red pigments, stratified one above the other and the microfined particles of dust whirling around give a subtle impression of the lunar landscape. Small habitation patches may be seen widely spread on the sandy and rocky slopes around the oasis, where one may find groves of poplar and thin vegetation. Deep below, foaming and fuming Spiti and its many tributaries may be seen tumbling down between the rocks.

## MOUNTAIN SYSTEM

Three major ranges of the Himalayan mountains system traverse Kinnaur almost in parallel formation from northwest to the southeast. These are: the Dhauladhar range, the Great Himalay range and the Zaskar mountains. The Satluj river flowing from northeast to southwest pierces through all these mountain ranges, dividing the district almost in two equal parts.

### The Dhauladhar Range

The outpost of the Himalayan mountain system is the sub-Himalay range. Anchored in the Gandgarh peak on the Indus in the northwest, this sub-Himalay range on entering Himachal Pradesh is known as the Dhauladhar (the fabled Dhavalgiri). It is the most spectacular feature of this range. Dhauladhar follows the southeasterly course and ends up in the Ganga watershed, south of the Baspa valley of Kinnaur.

In its total length of about 500 kilometres, this range is pierced by several rivers, like the Jhelum, Chenab, Ravi and Beas. The Satluj cuts through it at Wangtu in lower Kinnaur. Thus, the entire range is broken vertically into several ridges, which are identified



Kinnaur: The land of mighty peaks and perpetual snow.



by their distinct geological and geographical characteristics. The Dhauladhar stands as a formidable barrier for the moisture-laden low-lying southwesterly monsoonal clouds, which shed most of their burden and pass on high and dry upstream. Thus, even lower Kinnaur receives scanty rainfall.

### **The Great Himalay Range**

Rising from Nanga Parvat (8,128 metres), where the Indus cuts through it, and soaring high above the snowline, the Great Himalay range traces a gigantic curve to traverse Himachal Pradesh and runs beyond. It is a zone of dazzling heights, perpetual snow and mighty glaciers. Some of the world's highest peaks are located in this range. In Kinnaur, the perennially snow-covered Mani Peak (6,593 metres) and Kinnar Kailash (*Raldang*) (6,473 metres) are located on this range. This range is pierced by the Satluj and the Para rivers towards the eastern extremity of Kinnaur.

The Great Himalay range demarcates natural and ethnic divide between the xeric and arctic environmental conditions in the barren northeastern part and the humid and dry-temperate southwestern segments of the district. While the northeastern segment of the district is predominantly Buddhist, the people living in the southwestern part, i.e., lower Kinnaur follow a faith system that represents the Buddhist-Brahmanical conglomerate.

### **The Zaskar Mountains**

The northern declines of Great Himalay range, after having reached the crest, descend northeastwards in numerous ranges and ridges, namely the Zaskar range, the Ladakh range, the Kailash range and the Karakoram range. These ranges, varying between 7,700 and 4,500 metres above MSL, run almost parallel from the southeast to the northwest to the edge of Tibetan plateau. Of these, the glacier-rich Zaskar range soars to the stupendous heights with numerous peaks rising above 6,000 metres, demarcating the northeastern boundary of this district with Tibet. The highest twin peaks of the district – Leo Purgyal North Peak (6,777 metres) and Leo Purgyal South Peak (6,763 metres) – are located on the Zaskar range.

## DRAINAGE SYSTEM

The **Satluj**, the *Shatadru* of Indian classical traditions, is the principal river of Kinnaur district. To the Tibetans, it is known as the *Langchhen Khabab* (also *Langzing Khampa*), which means the river originating from the mouth of an elephant or the 'Elephant River'. However, as it flows down, it is known by various traditional names, such as *Muksung*, i.e., a great river, around Namgia and still lower down as *Sampoo* or *Sangpoo* or *Sanpo*. Further, below Moorang, it is known as *Zung-Tee* or *Zeungti*,<sup>1</sup> which means the 'golden river'. For that reason, a traditional community of gold-washers, known as *Daule*, earned its livelihood by gold-washing at Rampur, Sunni and Bilaspur towns, all situated on its right bank. Frazer also found several huts of "gold-finders" on the bank of Satluj below Kumharsain during his visit in May 1815.<sup>2</sup> Against *Daule*, a community of iron-washers, known as *Dhaugari*, existed at Mandi town on the Beas, that carries iron particles in its water.

Dropping almost 2,000 metres in about 130 kilometres distance from its entry point in Kinnaur at about 3,050 metres from MSL near Shipki-la (3,700 metres) to 1,220 metres from MSL near Kafaur, where it leaves Kinnaur, it is one of the fastest, if not the fastest, rivers of the subcontinent and longest of the rivers of Himachal Pradesh, having a total length of 1,448 kilometres. It rises in the distant highland of Tibet in the southern slopes of Mount Kailash (6,716 metres) at the northern end of Rakshas Tal or Rakas Tal (Tib. *Langak tso*) near the abandoned goldfield, west of the Mansarovar (Tib.: *Tso Mapham* or *Tsomavang*).<sup>3</sup> It enters India (Kinnaur) near Shipki-la (3,700 metres) and gushes forth in the district from north-east to southwest, making steep and dreary abysses through the numerous impregnable rocky formations. Thus, in the Satluj gorge, the traditional villages are located on the higher gentler spurs, ledges and slopes on the fabled Hindustan-Tibet road or in the open side valleys of its numerous tributaries. However, after the construction of the all-weather motorable National Highway No. 22 along the river, many new roadside villages have spilled over closer to the river. Bhabanagar, Wangtu, Tapari, Poari are some of such settlements. Besides, many traditional villages have also extended downwards to the road edge. Spillo, Kanam, Poo, Maling,

etc. are some of such villages. The Satluj river is fed by the innumerable perennial streams and torrents, cascading down from the snowy heights on its both flanks. The main tributaries of the Satluj river on its right bank in the district are the Spiti, Ropa, Taiti, Kashang, Wangar and Shorang. On the left bank, the Titang, Gymthing, Tidong, Baspa and Solding rivers join the Satluj.

### **Tributaries on the Right Bank**

The *Spiti* is the second largest river of the district. It rises near the northwestern end of Spiti valley near the Kunzam-la (4,550 metres) that separates Lahul from Spiti of the Lahul & Spiti district. Flowing through the Spiti valley from northwest to southeast, it takes an abrupt southerly turn at Sumdo to enter Kinnaur district. Fed by the innumerable rills and streams coming from the glacial heights, the Spiti cuts its way through the ostensibly impregnable rocky obstructions and gushes forth in a serpentine manner in the rugged environment of the Hangrang tehsil to ultimately descend sharply into the Satluj at Khab (2,598 metres), where the confluence presents a spectacular sight.

The *Ropa* flows down from the glacial fields around the Gunsairang-la (5,215 metres) of the Shrikhand range that separates the Ropa valley of Kinnaur from the Pin valley of Spiti. This valley, famous for its delicious apples, is also known as the Giabong valley after the name of its principal village. After flowing for about 30 kilometres, it joins the Satluj at Shyaso (2,700 metres), a roadside village on the NH 22.

The *Taiti*, also known as the Pejur river, is one of the largest tributaries of the Satluj. It flows almost parallel to the Ropa Tobrt, following the north-south course until it joins the Satluj at the locality, known as Keerang Khad. The valley formed by this river is known for the rich *chilgoza* forests that has made Rarang, Jangi and other villages in this valley very rich.

The *Kashang* is a violent and foaming torrent, having considerable flow of water that cascades down into the Satluj with great roaring sound.

The *Wangar* (also called the Bhaba) is formed by the two streams – the Bhaba and Sooreh. It is a sizable stream that carries

not only a large volume of water, but huge boulders also roll down in its rapids and waterfalls.

The *Shorang* is virtually a stunning rapid. Coming down from near the Kamba Khango (4,785 metres) and cutting sharp furrow in the rocky face of the mountain in the Pandra-bees *pargana* of Kinnaur, it falls steeply into the Satluj (about 1,220 metres) opposite to village Kafaur.

### Tributaries on the Left Bank

The *Titang* flows from the heights on the Indo-Tibetan border. It is a fast flowing torrent, with numerous rapids and falls. At places, its fall is so steep that nothing but foam and sprays of vapours only are visible.

The *Gymthing* rises from the dreary heights near the Keobrang-la (5,320 metres) and Gangthang-la (5,200 metres) on the Indo-Tibetan border.

The *Tidong* (also called the Tirung) stream also rises from the glacial heights near the Khimokul-la on the Indo-Tibetan border and falls in the Satluj near Rispa. A hydroelectric project is proposed on this stream. Gerard notes about the Tidong valley:

"....this is without exception the most rugged glen I have seen; its length, from the Sutluj as far up as it is capable of cultivation, is fourteen miles, and the highest village, Churang, must be nearly 12,000 feet; I did not visit it, but stopped at another place nearly two miles lower down, which was 11,700 feet. In all there are three villages, none of which are large...."

"The rocks are hollowed out into innumerable caves, some of them capable of conveniently sheltering fifty or sixty people; and the river, whose fall is 300 feet per mile, breaks on the scattered fragments with a deadening noise, reverberated ten-fold from the surrounding caverns."<sup>4</sup>

The *Baspa river* is the second largest tributary of the Satluj. This river originates from the northern slopes of the glacial massif of Dhauladhar that demarcates the watershed for the Satluj and Bhagirathi. It traverses gently the floor of Sangla valley, where it

spreads into several channels, forming small islands of stones and pebbles. As it reaches its tail end, it turns into a veritable rapid, crashing through the white granite boulders. Ultimately it falls into the Satluj on its left bank at Karcham (1,828 metres) after covering a distance of about 72 kilometres. Karcham, the gateway to Baspa valley (also known as the Sangla valley after its principal village) was once a sizable village, but after coming up of the Karcham hydroelectric unit, it is now a diminutive village. In this region, slopes rise steeply from the banks of Satluj and Baspa rivers.

The *Solding* rises from the glacial heights of over 5,000 metres of Dhauladhar that separates Kinnaur district from the Rohru tehsil of Shimla district. Solding is very treacherous rivulet. During the lean period, it appears to be a harmless feature, but in spate, it knows no bounds and flows like a storming rapid, carrying rolling rocks and huge boulders. This rivulet joins the Satluj below Bhabanagar. It has earned considerable notoriety for its unpredictable behaviour. In the recent years, its flash floods not only swept away bridges, eroded banks but also washed away houses at Bhabanagar.

### BIOPHYSICAL DIVISIONS

Located deep in the Satluj basin beyond Dhauladhar and extended to the xeric and arctic conditions of the barren trans-Himalayan environment, the geographical expanse of Kinnaur can be identified into three biophysical divisions: Spiti Basin, Middle Kinnaur and Lower Kinnaur.

*Spiti Basin:* This very rugged and mountainous region extends over the extreme northeastern part of district Kinnaur, covering entirely the Hangrang sub-tehsil in the tail-end of Spiti river and the upper reaches of Satluj from the Indian border at Shipki-la to the Ropa valley. The Spiti sub-division of the Lahul & Spiti district abuts on it in the north and northwest and Tibet towards the east. Although, the trans-Himalayan xeric and arctic geo-climatic condition predominate here, yet unlike the plateau-like Spitian topography, the area here is largely rugged, rocky and deeply furrowed into gorges. Enclosed by the steep, rocky and serrated slopes of the Great Himalay and the Zaskar ranges, landscape here is

marked by the rocky strata of brown and yellow hues, with seams of black, white, grey, green, pink and ochre formations in between. Among that bleak and sterile wilderness, habitational patches may be seen here amidst the poplar and juniper groves and the terraced fields, irrigated by the gurgling rills, coming down from the desolate glacial heights. Most of the villages in this area are located on the terraces, located at the safer and higher levels from the rivers. The legendary monastery village of Nako, located on the left bank of Spiti at 3,625 metres, is at the highest village of the area.

*Middle Kinnaur:* Defined between the Great Hirnaley range and the Dhauladhar, major part of Kinnaur district, characterised by the dry-temperate climatic conditions, falls in this stupendous and rugged mountainous expanse. The thunderous Satluj, piercing through the rocky formations, divides this part almost into two equal halves. Numerous feeders join the Satluj from its both sides, but the Baspa river, which joins it on its left bank, is the important one among those for the beautiful valley that it forms. The sacred Mount Kinnar Kailash (6,716 metres) is the most prominent physical feature of this mid-Kinnaur region.

*Lower Kinnaur:* From Karcham, where Baspa joins the Satluj, to a place a little below village Chaura, from where Shimla district starts, is the verdurous part of Kinnaur, with its temperate climatic conditions. It receives copious rainfall in summer and snow in winter, thus, presenting an enchanting display of green pasturing slopes and evergreen forests of all species. The Satluj cuts through the rocky strata, forming almost vertical and undercut banks on its both sides and falling over 600 metres in the distance of about 35 kilometres between Karcham (1,828 metres) and Chaura. The habitational areas are here perched precariously higher up on the mountain slopes. On the left bank of Satluj, the Dhauladhar divides lower Kinnaur from the Rohru area of district Shimla. This range reaches over 5,000 metres in this stretch and contains a number of glaciers, giving rise to many small rivulets. The more significant among those include the Duling Gad that pours into the Satluj at Choltu and the Solding Gad, which joins the Satluj below Bhabanagar. The Solding Gad has achieved considerable notoriety in recent years due to the frequent devastating flash floods.

## FLORA &amp; FAUNA

In almost all books on Kinnaur details about flora and fauna have been reproduced almost verbatim from the gazetteers. Therefore, I have eschewed writing about that, but a brief mention of some of the important exotic species typical to the area may be desirable here. However, more importantly, a detailed description of the medicinal herbs and plants of Kinnaur has been given. The application of those herbs and plants in the traditional materia medica has also been discussed in detail.

The nature has endowed this district with a wide range of bioclimatic ambiance. Starting from Chaura – the gateway to Kinnaur – one proceeds along the Satluj deep in the valley from the sub-temperate conditions to the dry-temperate in the main central part of Kinnaur to the xeric and arctic conditions in the trans-Himalayan upper Kinnaur. However, throughout this journey upstream, high and perpetually snow-covered or bald mountain ranges as high as 5,000 metres and above may be seen standing sentinel on both sides of the narrow valley. Thus, though a wide variation in the climatic condition may be found even within a short distance, the climate generally remains bracingly cool even in summer. Even so, one may have a feel of all the four seasons. While the spring, summer and autumn are very short, the winter is very long and severe, but that is the busiest festive time in Kinnaur and rest of the trans-Himalayan interiors.

Under that diverse geophysical conditions, while the high altitudinal zones of Kinnaur are bare of any type of cognizable vegetation, the alpine meadows are the rich repositories of alpine medicinal herbs and plants and myriad flowering species. Down in the valley areas, innumerable floral species may be found flourishing. However, exotic wild animals may be seen roaming even at such unearthly snowy heights, where even a blade of grass is not visible.

As one enters Kinnaur, the rain-fed forests become scarce, the *ban* oak (*Quercus incana*) and rhododendron (*Rhododendron arboretum*), so common in the rain-fed forests of Shimla forests, become scarce here giving way to the variety of pines and oaks in different microclimatic and altitude-specific conditions. Among these, *chil*



The apple boom.

(*Pinus longifolia*), kail (*Pinus excelsa*), rai (*Abies smithiana*), tosh (*Picea webbiana*), shur (*Juniperus excelsa*), mohru (*Quercus dilatata*), kharsoo (*Quercus semicarpifolia*), chilgoza or chilgoza-pine or neoza (*Pinus gerardiana*, named after Capt. Alexander Gerard), deodar (*Cedrus deodara*), bhojpatr or the birch-bark (*Betula utilis*) are important for their commercial value. In the snow-bitten and sunburnt brown, yellow and ochre slopes of upper Kinnaur, only the stunted alpine variety of wild roses may be found, besides the much coveted thorny seabuckthorn that flourishes along the streams and irrigation channels. However, around the villages of Mane and Chango, full-grown trees of seabuckthorn are also found.

### Medicinal Herbs & Plants

Kinnaur is a treasure house for innumerable medicinal and aromatic herbs and plants. These grow naturally in the dry-temperate forests, grasslands and the alpine heights. Some of these are rare species and a few of them are verging on extinction due to over-exploitation during the modern times with the expansion of market culture from the mainland. Himachal Pradesh Forest





A cosy room in the stem of mighty deodar.

Produce Transit (Land Rules) Amendment Rules 1994 provide for the regulatory system for collection and disposal of the forest produce. However, these regulations remain largely inoperative in the absence of an organised and effective system and the community participation. More than two-third of the geographical area of Himachal Pradesh is under forest, and there is hardly a sufficient infrastructure to manage it effectively. The local people and the outsiders in connivance with the locals have been collecting the plants and herbs in haphazard manner, seriously depleting the natural resources. They dispose off the crude material to the local shopkeepers, who have established clandestine links with the business houses in the mainland. Mostly the villagers barter these herbs and plants for their domestic needs or for the paltry monetary return, whereas the local traders make a fast buck out of it. This exploitative system is not only adversely bearing on the natural resources, even making some species extinct, but also cutting deep into the rural economy and state revenue. Therefore, there is dire need to conserve and protect this natural wealth.

I have consulted several books and also made field inquiries for compiling data on the medicinal herbs and plants of Kinnaur



*Chilgoza (pinus gerardiana) trees.*

area. However, in this regard, the *Medicinal and Aromatic Plants of Himachal Pradesh* by Dr. Narain Singh Chauhan and *The Nomadic Shepherds of North West Himalayas: In the Context of Kinnaur (A Socio Cultural Study)* by Vidyasagar Negi have been of great help for me. It may be noted that none of these herbs and plants are exclusive to Kinnaur, but may also be found in other parts of the Himalayan region, where congenial biophysical conditions are available. These medicinal herbs and plants have not only been traditionally in use in the households, Ayurvedic and Tibetan formulations for innumerable ailments, but these are also being increasingly used in the modern medical systems – homeopathy and allopathy. Some of these have also been

used in the Yunani system. Some of these medicinal herbs and plants are noted hereunder.

*Asmaina (Ephedra gerardiana)* is known by various local names, such as *budagur*, *rachi*, *khanda phag*, *tutgantha*, *somlata*, *som*, *chhe*, *chhedang*, etc. in the high Himalayan interiors, where it grows wild from Kashmir to Sikkim. It is a rich source of alkaloids, ephedrine being the principal one. Its roots, twigs and berries are used to manufacture various types of medicines for respiratory infections, hay fever, allergic rashes, rheumatism, syphilis, cardiac ailments, etc.

*Austakhaddus*, *ustakhadus*, all-heal or self-heal (*Prunella vulgaris*) yields essential oil. The herb is considered antiseptic,

expectorant, anti-rheumatic, restorative, tonic, astringent, carminative, anti-spasmodic and stimulant. It is also used in fever and cough, haemorrhages, diarrhoea, etc. Its syrup is also used for healing of internal wounds.

*Bala* or country mallow (*Sida cordifolia*) is also known as *kharenti*, *bariyar*, *barela*, *sida*, etc. This shrub contains an alkaloid, a fixed oil, phytosterol mucin, resin, resinous acids and potassium nitrate. It is reputed to be a tonic and aphrodisiac. Because of its varied therapeutic applications, this shrub has been used extensively in many Ayurvedic formulations.

*Banaksha*, *banfshah*, *gule-banakshan* or violet (*Viola serpens*) is found throughout the temperate Himalay. In Kinnaur, it is found only in the lower part. It is aperient, antipyretic, demulcent, diaphoretic, diuretic, emetic, emollient, expectorant and febrifuge. It is indicated in asthma, bleeding piles, throat cancer, etc.

*Bankakri* (*Podophyllum hexandrum*) is also known as *bankakroo*, *knada-ri-mokri* and *giriparpat*. This herb is sporadically found in the inner temperate environment of Himachal Pradesh. Its rhizomes and roots yield resin and essential oil, wax and mineral salts. Its roots and rhizomes are considered hepatic, stimulant, purgative, restorative, vermifuge and bitter tonic.

*Bare* (*Acorus calamus*) is known by several local names, viz., *baryan*, *boiye*, *boi*, *shalbou*, *vacha*, *bach*, etc. It grows widely in Himachal Pradesh, but is found only in the lower parts of Kinnaur. Its dry rhizomes produce bitter aromatic volatile oil and its roots contain several other chemicals. Its powdered roots are used as vermifuge. It is also indicated for flatulence. Its leaves and roots are also used as an effective insecticide for domestic pests and insects. Its fresh rootstock has also been used as a substitute for ginger.

*Bemi*, *behmi* or *rek* (*Prunus persica*) trees, a local variety of wild peach, are often grown on the edges of the terraced fields for its delicious fleshy aril and kernel. The sweet oil extracted from its kernels is used as cooking medium. However, this oil is held efficacious for muscular pains. The fleshy aril of this fruit is also used for home-made liquor. The shepherds of Kinnaur consider the leaves of *bemi* vermicide. They apply its bruised leaves on the

lacerating wounds of their sheep and goats. However, its tender leaves are considered highly poisonous.

*Bhekhal*, *bhekhla* or *bhenkal* (*Prinsepia utilis*) is only found in the lower parts of Kinnaur. The oil extracted from its kernels is used as a cooking medium and for soap making. The *bhekhal* oil is used externally in rheumatism and pains resulting from fatigue. The physico-chemical proprieties of *bhekhal* oil are reported to resemble closely to that of olive oil.

*Bhojpatr* or the birch-bark (*Betula utilis*) has been known by different local names, such as *bhurjpatr*, *bhuj*, *bhooj*, *bhurj-granthi*, etc. The people have been using it for waterproofing their houses and as a writing medium because of its polymeric quality, durability and resistance against pests. In the *Ayurved*, the therapeutic qualities of *bhojpatr* have been explained at length. In the Yunani system, *bhojpatr* has been indicated for treating earache.

*Birnjaisif* or *yarrow* (*Achillea millefolium*) grows in Sangla valley of Kinnaur. It produces milfoil and volatile oil, acids, alkaloids, salts, etc. It has variety of medicinal uses. Its leaves when chewed bring immediate relief from toothache.

*Bras*, *buras*, *brosang*, *burasang* or *bruans* (*Rhododendron arbo-reum*) is an evergreen and shady tree that bears bright red globose flowers. Young green leaves of *bras* are reported to be depressant and poisonous. The petals of its flowers contain ursolic acid, quercitrin and resin. These are used in chutneys, syrups, jellies and juices. It is believed that the formulation of the petals of *bras*, dried in shade and fried in butter of *churu* (trans-Himalayan cow), regulates excessive menstruation.

*Chharma* or seabuckthorn (*Hippophae rhamnoides*) thrives in the xeric trans-Himalayan cold desert (or snow desert) as a modified shrub. This exotic plant is also known by many other local names, such as *chherma*, *sarla*, *tirku*, *surch*, *shure*, *surachu*, *khoonoo*, etc., and is a very rich source for numerous alkaloids, polyphenols, steroids, terpenoids, flavins and sugars. The fruits (seeds) are rich source of vitamin-C and fatty oil. Its syrup or soup is regarded efficacious against hepatitis and pulmonary ailments. It is also known to cure body pain. It has been used as an emollient and for treating sunburn and tumours.

The *chharma* is a well-tried traditional veterinary medicine for several problems of the domestic animals. The decoction prepared from the juice of *chharma* and the urine of cow heals the skin infected with the infectious diseases, such as *khoro*, etc. Its juice is an effective antidote for certain poisonous varieties of leaves, grasses and animal feeds.

*Chhershup* or juniper (*Juniperus communis*) is also known variously as *hapusha*, *hauber*, *bethar*, *bitharh*, *theleru*, *chhershup*, *pethri*, etc. It grows in Kinnaur only in the head-reaches of Baspa valley. It produces only a little of essential oil, some resin, bitter juniperine and organic acids. It is considered aphrodisiac, styptic, and found useful in the stomatitis, hemicrania, chronic bronchitis and diseases of liver and spleen. It also has carminative and diuretic properties.

*Chhuchha*, *chuk*, *amli*, *chuma*, *kalabis* or seabuckthorn (*Hippophae salicifolia*) grows wild as a small tree. Its bark contains beta-sitosterol and alkaloids, and it has been indicated as a cure for certain types of cancer. Fruits are highly acidic and a rich source



Carrying *jyokhti* homewards.

of the vitamin C. Its juice is prescribed in pulmonary ailments and tuberculosis. The extracts of this plant are also efficacious for treating sunburn and tumours. It is also used for medicinal cosmetic formulations.

*Chilgoza* or *chilgoza*-pine or *neoza* (*Pinus gerardiana*), a small to moderate sized tree, is largely found in Pangi valley of Chamba and in Kinnaur, which account for more than 90% of total area of 2,022 hectares under *chilgoza*-pine forest in the country. The traditional name of *chilgoza* in Kinnaur is *rhi*. *Chilgoza* has been one of the highly priced edible kernels. The entire domestic requirement of *chilgoza* is met from Kinnaur, which produces about 200 tonnes of this nutritious kernel.

The *chilgoza*-pine occasionally grows to the height of about 25 metres in the dry-temperate conditions between the latitude of 1,500 and 3,300 metres, where snowfall is heavy during the winter. It is highly resinous, therefore, its splinters, locally called *iyokhti*, are used for lighting purposes during the night. The *chilgoza* cones ripen by September-October, when these are plucked green. Usually, each cone contains 140 to 200 seeds.

The *chilgoza* seeds are considered carminative, stimulant and expectorant. The thick and dark oil (called *nidar* in Kinnaur), extracted from its stumps by destructive distillation, is regarded to have healing qualities. It is applied to the wounds, ulcers and eruptions. As a substitute for the deodar oil, this oil is also used to treat mange in the horses and sore feet in cattle. It is also used as wood preservative against termites and other insects.

*Chora* (*Angelica glauca*) is also known as *choraka*, *chura*, *chamchora*, *gandrayan*, *saphal*, etc. This aromatic herb grows in the humus-rich forest soil in the high mountains. In Kinnaur, it is usually found on the edges of fields. Its rootstock yields essential oil, resin and valerianic acid. Its roots and fruits contain several furocoumarins and some phenols and lactones. The roots are pungent, aromatic, stomachic, tonic, stimulant, carminative, diaphoretic and diuretic. It increases appetite and is indicated in typhoid, bronchitis, flatulence, colic pain, etc. Roots are used as condiment, spice and flavouring agent. It is also used in the preparation of gin and liqueurs.

The bruised leaves and roots of *chora* mixed with salt are fed to

the sheep and goats infected with infectious diseases, called *khoro*, *gundiyan* and *phashang*.

*Chuli* (*Prunus armeniaca*) is a local variety of the wild apricot. It is found in plenty around the fields and on the mountain slopes in Kinnaur. The fleshy aril of this fruit is dried and stored for daily use to make a very nourishing and popular drink, called *chuli funting*. The *chuli funting* is regarded for its carminative quality. The oil extracted from its kernels is used for cooking. This oil is used as base for many traditional relaxant formulations. It is also used for home-made liquor.

The fleshy aril of *chuli* has several applications in the veterinary medication. The decoction, called *chho-mor-tee*, prepared by soaking the dried fleshy aril of *chuli* in water is given to the cattle, especially goats and sheep.

*Deodar* (*Cedrus deodara*) is known by several names in the Himalayan region. It is a very precious plant and has several therapeutic applications because of its chemical contents. The wood oil contains oleo-resin and essential oil, while its needles contain ascorbic acid. The wood is carminative, diaphoretic and diuretic. The formulation of its wood is given in fever, flatulence, heart palpitations, paralysis, pulmonary ailments, dropsy and urinary complications. Its formulation with turmeric and *guggulu* is indicated as an efficacious alternative for gonorrhoea, syphilis, gout and rheumatism. The paste of deodar wood is applied to the indolent swellings and its tar is used in heavy doses as a favourite alternative in the chronic skin diseases. It is also used externally for leprosy and ulcers.

The thick and dark coloured oil extracted from the stumps and roots of deodar wood by the destructive distillation resembles crude turpentine. This oil is known as *nidar* in Kinnaur. The people have been using it traditionally for treating ulcers and eruptions, and for mange in the horses and sore feet in cattle. The *nidar* has been a traditional medicine for treating the infectious skin diseases, called *khoro*, *gundiyan* and *phashang*, in the goats and sheep. The deodar oil is also used as an effective wood preservative against termites and other insects.

*Dhoop* or *jari-dhoop* (*Jurinea dolomiaea*) is widely found in the alpine pastures (locally known as *kanda*) in Himachal Pradesh.

The aromatic roots of this herb form an essential raw material for *dhoop*, *agarbattis*, *havan-samagri*, etc. The aromatic oil extracted from its roots is regarded useful in gout and rheumatism. This herb is also used for household treatment of fever. It is also used as a stimulant during child-birth. It checks excessive bleeding, fever, colic and skin eruptions.

**Dhoop, chalai, leur** or Indian juniper (*Juniperus macropoda*) is found sporadically only in Pooh area of Kinnaur, but it is in abundance in Lahul. Its berries and leaves yield essential oils, used as flavouring agent for gin and cordials. It has certain Ayurvedic applications also.

**Hathpanja** (*Dactylorhiza hatagirea*) is mostly found in the Baspa valley and surrounding area. The paste made of its tuber is applied on the cuts and wounds.

**Hop** (*Humulus lupulus*) has been cultivated on the commercial scale in Lahul and its cultivation has been extended to the lower part of Kinnaur, but it is still not popular with the people. It contains essential oil, choline and alpha acids. It prevents worms, allays nervous tension and prevents indigestion. Its infusion is regarded as tonic and sedative. However, it is mainly used in manufacturing beer.

**Jangali kutth** (*Arctium lappa*) contains several acids, carbohydrates, fats and volatile oils, etc. It has been used for cutaneous infections, rheumatism, gout, etc. The extract of this herb has been found to cause sharp and long-lasting reduction of blood sugar. Its ethyl alcohol extract has also been indicated as cardiac stimulant, diuretic and spasmolytic.

**Jatamansi** (*Nardostachys grandiflora*) is also known as *balchharh*, *khome*, *mansi* and *machhi* at various places. This herb is found in the alpine heights of the western Himalayan interiors between 3,000 and 5,000 metres above MSL. It is an aromatic perennial herb with woody rhizomatic rootstock. The rhizome is regarded as tonic, stimulant and anti-spasmodic, laxative, etc. It has various therapeutic applications in the Ayurvedic and allopathic medicines. Traditionally, it has been used to treat epilepsy, hysteria, gastric disorder, leprosy, etc.

**Kail, cheel** or blue pine (*Pinus wallichiana*) is found in the lower



parts of Kinnaur mixed with deodar, fir and spruce, but it grows abundantly in the outer Himalayan slopes. This resinous wood yields oleoresin and turpentine oil. The oil extracted from its needles is known to possess antibacterial property. People have been successfully using the bark of tender plants as bandage (or plaster) on the dislocated or fractured human or cattle bones.

*Kakhum* (*Myrsine africana*) is also known variously as *shamshad*, *berang*, *bidang*, *baibidang*, etc. It is essentially a hedging shrub, but its edible fruits are known to possess anthelmintic properties of evacuating the parasitic intestinal worms. This fruit is also used as a laxative in dropsy and colic. Its gum is indicated for dysmenorrhea and debility. The decoction of its leaves is used as blood purifier.

*Kala-zira* (*Bunium persicum* or *Carum bulbocastanum*) is also called *umbu*, *siah-zira* or *krishnajeerak* (Sanskrit) is cultivated in the higher reaches of Lahul & Spiti district of Himachal Pradesh. At Sangla, it has been cultivated in farm along with saffron. It is a low volume, high value and non-perishable flavouring agent for dishes. In the traditional system, its seeds are regarded as stimulant, and it has also been used as carminative and for treating various stomach troubles. It has also been used traditionally against jaundice, cough and cold.

*Kala-zira* (*Carum carvi*) grows wild in the arid heights of Kinnaur. This wild variety has been known variously as *shinguzira*, *mawo*, *dru*, etc. The shepherds fear this plant, for its tender shoots are considered toxic to the lambs. It is generally used as a flavouring agent for various traditional dishes. Besides, it has several medicinal uses as carminative, abortifacient, anthelmintic, aromatic, deodorant, diuretic, etc. It is also indicated for rheumatism.

*Kandaro-dhokeru* (*Bergenia stracheyi*) is also known as *pashanbhed*, *pakhanbed*, etc. This rhizomatous perennial herb grows in the sub-alpine and alpine heights in the shady patches. Its rhizomes contain gallic and tannic acids, glucoside, mucilage, wax, mineral salts and other compounds. Its bitter-tasting rhizomes and roots act as astringent, diuretic, antipyretic and tonic.

*Karu*, *kaur*, *trayamana* or Indian Gentian (*Gentiana kurroo*) is usually found in the alpine grassy slopes in the western Himalayan region. The roots and rhizomes of this plant contain gentio-

picrin, gentianic acid, pectin and sugar. It is used as a bitter tonic, stomachic and febrifuge. It is regarded carminative, diaphoretic, digestive and useful in hepatic disorders and urinary infections. It is traditionally a known medicine for fattening horses. The *karu* is an efficacious traditional veterinary medicine. It is mixed with salt and fed to the goats and sheep afflicted with the infectious skin diseases, known as *khoro*, *gundiyan* and *phashang*.

*Kasani* (*Cichorium intybus*), i.e., chicory or wild endive, is cultivated in Kinnaur which meets most of the country's demand. This herb is also known as *kasni*, *kashini*. The ash of roots of this herb is rich in potash. The bitter principal is the glucoside of fructose and pyrocatechuic acid. The juice of roots contains stearin, mannite and tartaric acid. This herb is said to be quite useful in fever, vomiting, diarrhoea and enlargement of spleen.

*Kesar*, i.e. saffron (*Crocus sativus*) is known variously as *keshar*, *kunkum*, *zafran*, *zabran*, etc. It has been traditionally cultivated in Kashmir, but it is also being cultivated at Sangla in Kinnaur district on experimental basis. *Kesar* contains glucoside, crocin, crocetin, picro-crocin, riboflavin, thiamine, essential oil and other compounds. It is mainly used as a colouring and flavouring agent in foods, but is also indicated for numerous therapeutic applications: as nerve sedative, stimulant, stomachic, abortifacient, etc.

*Khor*, *akhrot* or walnut (*Juglans regia*) grows wild throughout the Himalayan region, but it is also cultivated for its multiple uses. Each part of this tree, from roots to bark (popularly called *dandasa*), wood, leaves and fruits is of immense value in many ways. People in the villages have traditionally been using the juice of unripe fruits in alopecia. The bark of its root, mixed with mustard oil is useful in leukoderma. Its bark and leaves have been used as dye, and for cleaning teeth. The extract of its leaves has strong bactericidal property. It contains numerous acids, fixed oil, B-group of vitamins and several minerals. Its formulations are indicated in several disorders. Its leaves are used for curing scrofula, rickets and leucorrhoea. Its oil is an effective laxative. It is also given in torpid liver. The decoction of bark is galactafuge and it is used to stop mammary secretions. Its kernel is supposed to be aphrodisiac and vermifuge. Its oil is used as drying agent for printing inks, paints and varnishes.

*Kuth* (*Saussurea costus*) is known variously as *pachak*, *kushittha*, *kootth*, *kuste-hindi*, etc. Its roots contain essential oil, alkaloid, resin and tannins. It is anodyne, astringent, carminative, digestive, diaphoretic, deodorant, disinfectant, diuretic, emmenagogue, expectorant, febrifuge, narcotic, spasmodic, stimulant, stomachic, tonic and vermifuge. It is also indicated in many bronchitic, dental, colic and in some cardiac disorders. It is also efficacious in rheumatism and promotes urination.

*Kutki* (*Picrorhiza kurroa*) is also known as *karru*, *kaur*, *kori*, *tikta*, *karvi* at different places from Kashmir to Sikkim in the alpine Himalay. This plant has been used variously and extensively in many Ayurvedic formulations as anthelmintic, appetiser, blood purifier, cardiac expectorant, febrifuge, stomachic, etc. It is also efficacious in high blood pressure, asthma, cough and cold, bile trouble, jaundice, leprosy, etc.

*Laljari* or *laldori* (*Geranium nepalense*) is found in the parts of lower Kinnaur. It is rich in several acids and other compounds, but it is valued for its red tannin, used for various preparations and oils as a substitute for *ratnjot* (*Arnebia euchroma*). This plant is also considered as an astringent and used in kidney troubles.

*Mamira* (*Thalictrum foliolosum*) is also known as *pilijari*, *chaitra*, *sarphar* or *bishkaral*. The rootstock and rhizome of this herb contain soluble salts of berberine, magnoflorine, palmitine and jatrorrhizine. The extract, powder and decoction of the roots and rhizomes of this herb are used for treating ophthalmia. The roots are also used as an antiperiodic, diuretic, aperient and a bitter tonic during convalescence. The paste of this plant is used externally for treating boils.

*Mohro*, *mouro*, *mohra-bish* or *safed-bish* (*Aconitum deinorrhizum*) is also known as *ratsnabh*. It produces highly toxic pseudo-aconitine that affects both heart and central nervous system. It is mixed with mustered oil for local application in neuralgia, paralysis and muscular rheumatism. It is used in several Ayurvedic medicines.

*Mukhajali* or sundew (*Drosera peltata*) grows wild on the pasturing slopes (*kanda*) of high mountain ranges of Shimla district and lower Kinnaur. It is known to contain resin, certain enzymes and

yellowish-brown pigment, used for dying fabric. It is also known to be used in *swarn-bhasm* for treating syphilis, debility. It is also indicated for certain chronic respiratory infections. People in Kinnaur have been using its crushed leaves for treating blisters.

**Muramansi**, *mathosal* or *nesrawlo* (*Selinum wallichianum*) is found in the temperate pasturelands. Its roots yield furanocoumarins and fatty oils. The volatile oil extracted from its roots possesses hypotensive, sedative and analgesic properties. Essential oil is extracted from its seeds. Its root is regarded as a sedative and is used as substitute for *jatamansi* (*Nardostachys grandiflora*). It is also used in the local brew (called *ddheli*).

**Ogla** (*Fagopyrum esculentum*) is also locally known as *katthu*, *bhariesa*, *bharies*, and also as buckwheat. Its leaves and seeds contain rutin, enzymes, glycosides and several other compounds. For these chemical compounds, it is valued for preparing modern anti-haemorrhagic medicines. The decoction of its roots has traditionally been used for treating rheumatic pains, pulmonary ailments and urinary disorders.

**Padara** or *patrala* (*Heracleum lanatum*) is widely found in the drier and higher interiors of Himachal Pradesh. Its roots are the principal source of furocoumarin, heraclenin, heraclenol, xanthotoxol, spondin and cnadicanin. The xanthotoxin isolated from this plant is highly efficacious for leukoderma and psoriasis.

**Pattharchat** (*Bergenia ciliata*) is also known as *pashanbhed*, *pakhanbed* and *dhoklambu*. It thrives on the rocks, boulders and rocky strata under humid condition. Obviously, the shady ravines and rills are the most congenial places for this rhizomatous perennial herb to flourish. Its rhizome contains acids, mucilage, wax, mineral salts and other compounds. Its bitter-tasting rhizomes and roots act as astringent, diuretic, antipyretic and tonic but it has traditionally been used effectively in dissolving kidney and bladder stones.

**Patish**, *atcisha*, *atish* (*Aconitum heterophyllum*) has so ruthlessly been exploited that it is now one of the most endangered species. Its roots contain non-toxic alkaloids, atisine, acids, pectin and starch. The people of Kinnaur have been traditionally using the powdered root of this herb to treat colic and indigestion. The

decoction of *patish* is also indicated for treating flocks afflicted with poisonous effect.

*Pharna, koche, Sanp-saperia* (*A. przewalskianum*) is found in the high alpine pasturelands. Leaves of this herb form a flavoured condiment. Bulbs and inflorescences are also used as vegetable and spice. Dried and cut parts of leaves are marketed. The bulbs of *pharna*, eaten with milk, are believed to be antidote for snakebite.

*Ratnjot* (*Onosma bracteatum*) is also known as *dhamani*, *gojihva*, *gajavan*, etc. at different places. This herbaceous plant with black woody rootstock is widely found in the arid heights of the western Himalayan interiors from Kashmir to Kumaon. The red dye-yielding rootstock of this plant is extensively used as a colouring agent for wool and silk. The bruised roots are also applied externally to cutaneous eruptions. Its flowers are considered stimulant and cardiac tonic. It is also indicated for rheumatism, syphilis, leprosy, irritation of bladder and stomach and restlessness.

*Ratnjot, khamet or dimo* (*Arnebia euchroma*) is found in the arid and arctic climate of upper Kinnaur. Its roots contain Ac-Shikonin and related compounds. It has been reported to be an antipyretic, anti-inflammatory and antimicrobial. It has traditionally been used for toothache, earache and ailments of eyes. People have been using its roots as hair tonic.

*Revandchini* or rhubarb (*Rheum australe*) is also known as *revatchini*, *gandhini*, *chukri*, *archa*, *chuchi*, *tukshu*, *motininai* and *ushare-revand*. The dried rhizomes and roots of this herb yield certain acids and essential oil. It is known to be aperient, astringent, diuretic, emmenagogue, expectorant and tonic. Its roots are used as a panacea for stomach disorders, wounds, cuts and muscular swellings in local homes.

*Revandchini* or rhubarb (*Rheum moorcroftianum*) is also known as *chukri*, *archa*, *chuchi*, *lechu* and *ushare-revand*. The roots of this herb contain certain acids, anthraquinone derivatives, glucoside, tannins, etc. This herb is used as purgative in mild cases. People use its lotion or paste on the cuts and wounds, swellings, rashes, etc., having effect similar to iodine.

*Shingpillu* (*Juniperus recurva*) is known by several local names as *phillu*, *thelu*, *bhedara*, *wetyar*, *betharh*, *dhoop*. It grows on the

temperate and alpine heights in Kinnaur and in the interiors of Himachal Pradesh. Its wood yields resin, fruits and essential oil. The locals use its wood, leaves and twigs as incense, but the smoke from its green leaves is known to be emetic. Ethylalcohol extracted from its aerial parts is reported to be anticancer.

*Singli-mingli* (*Dioscorea deltoidea*) is also known as *singni-mingni*, *kins*, *ganj*, etc. at different places. This herb is found in lower Kinnaur, especially in Sangla area. However, after having been over-exploited, it is now found sporadically. Being rich in saponin, people have traditionally been using the paste of rhizomes and tubers as soap for washing wool and hair. It has also been used for treating stomach problems. The villagers have also feeding the crushed rhizomes, mixed with kneaded flour and salt, to the cattle to treat general gastric disorder. The rhizome of this extensive climber is reported to contain 4.80 to 8.00% diosgenin, which is used in modern steroids and other formulations to treat various disorders, including rheumatic diseases. The contents of this plant are also used for various injections, tablets and birth control pills.

*Tagar* or Indian valerian (*Valeriana jatamansi*) is also known as *sugandhbala*, *mushkbala*, *naknihani*, *nihani*, etc. This herb is abundant as forest undergrowth in the temperate forests of Himachal Pradesh. It yields essential oil and a typical monoterpene, called valepotriates. This herb is much used to manufacture perfumed powders and cardiac formulations. It is regarded as aphrodisiac, antiseptic, cardiac stimulant, carminative, diuretic, emmenagogue, expectorant, febrifuge and nervine tonic, etc.

*Thuno* or Himalayan yew (*Taxus wallichiana* or *Taxus baccata*) is also known as *thuner*, *birmi*, *rakhyala*, *rakhala*, *thangi*, *sthoneyak*, *thoon*, *sigacha*, etc. This evergreen tree is found mingled with fir and spruce in the temperate forests of lower Kinnaur. Due to the presence of toxin, all parts of this tree, except the fleshy aril, are poisonous. Besides, its leaves are reported to have certain acids, reducing sugars, resins, tannins, certain alkaloids, glucoside, etc. People have been using its tea to treat cancer. Taxol obtained from it is used in anticancer formulations.

*Tosh* or silver fir (*Abies spectabilis*) contains essential oil and an alkaloid. The decoction of its leaves is indicated for chronic bronchitis and pulmonary afflictions. In the traditional Ayurvedic

system, it is mentioned as a contraceptive.

*Tyangu* or hyssop (*Hyssopus officinalis*) is also known locally as *tengu*, *kuffa-yabis* and *juffa*. This aromatic and shrubby perennial plant is widely found in the higher reaches in the western part of the Himalay from Kashmir to Kumaon. It is rich in essential oil, fat, sugar, choline, tannin, carotin and xanthophylls, etc. It is regarded stimulant, carminative. Tea prepared from its infusion is considered efficacious in nervous disorders, toothache and pulmonary, digestive, uterine and urinary troubles. Besides, it has several other therapeutic applications. It is used in several Ayurvedic, Yunani and Tibetan medicines.

### **Faunal Wealth**

Kinnaur is known for its exotic faunal wealth. So much so that almost entire Kinnaur area is a veritable sanctuary of wildlife for various endangered species of wild animals. Among those, the musk deer, locally known as the *bina*, *roch* or *kya* is found in the rocky alpine cliffs. Besides, there are varieties of the wild ovine, caprine species, such as ibex (*Capra sibirica*), locally known as *bharal* or *askin*; wild sheep (*Ovis hodgsoni*), locally called *pho*; blue sheep (*Pseudois nahoor*); snow leopard (locally known as *pho thar*).

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4. Gerard, Capt. Alexander, *Account of Koonawur in the Himalaya* (Ed. George Lloyd), New Delhi (1993 reprint), pp. 19-20.

# 3

## KINNAUR THROUGH AGES

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### IN THE CLASSICAL LORE

Being naturally fortified by the high mountains from all sides and located deeper in the Satluj valley, Kinnaur has largely remained a terra incognita – geographically and socio-culturally a sequestered region – throughout the history until the recent pre-modern times. Having remained isolated from the mainstream culture, the people of mainland hardly had any tangible contact with this land and the people who inhabited it. Therefore, they had very vague and fantastic idea about this region and its people. For that reason, the fantastic imagery in the classical Indian literature about the *Kinnar Lok* and *Kinnars* was conveniently planted on this exotic land and its inhabitants by most of the modern writers on Kinnaur. Although, what has been written in the classical texts may be the metaphorical and poetic narration about the little-known communities of this region, the modern writers have taken the classical references rather too seriously, confounding objectivity in the study of this region. This aspect has been amply discussed in the beginning of 1<sup>st</sup> chapter.

Extended on both the banks of Satluj around its head-reaches in the Indian territory and fortified by the high mountain ranges, the fabled land of Kinnaur has been geographically and socio-culturally a sequestered region. Our knowledge about the antiquity of this region is largely laced with the hyperbolic narratives derived



from the *Epics*, *Purans* and other poetic works in Sanskrit. In fact, in those works, the *Kinnars* have nowhere been identified with the present-day Kinnaur, but the post-independence writers on Kinnaur have fancifully located those mythical beings in Kinnaur. In those classical works, the mythical *Kinnars* are described as the 'amorous beings,' playing on a stringed instrument (generally known as the *kinnari-veena*), apart from the human beings along with the *Gandharvs*, *Vidyadhars*, *Bhoots*, etc. They form a complement of the *Bhogasthanakmurti* manifestation of Vishnu<sup>1</sup> and the *Dakshinmurti* Shiv.<sup>2</sup> In the *Kumarsambhavam*, Kalidas visualises them in similar romantic situation.<sup>3</sup> In the Himalayan Buddhism, the *Kinnars* are the celestial musicians or the *mi-'am-c'i*. In one of the Tibetan versions of the *Sudhana Jatak* quoted by Waddell, a *Nag* named Utpal captures a marvellously beautiful *Kinnauri* fairy near the forest hermitage of Valkalayan at Hastinapur with his magical noose. The young prince of Hastinapur, named Sudhan or Manibhadr, frees her from the captivity of Utpal and marries her, showering all affection and love on her.<sup>4</sup>

In the Buddhist literary and art tradition also those *Kinnars* carry the same reputation. Hiuen-Tsang speaks of an ancient tradition at Vaishali, which tells that the men and *Kinnars* followed the Tathagat to Kushinagar, where he wished to die.<sup>5</sup> That may also be inferred from the way those are depicted in the Ajanta murals. For instance, in one of the murals, in Cave No. 17, inspired by a *Jatak*-theme, a pair of *Kinnars* is depicted. This cave, belonging to CE c. 475-500, is attributed to Vakatak king Harisen.<sup>6</sup> The *Kinnars* also appear in the sculptures of Sanchi as the celestial beings.

Thus, the *Kinnars* have figured extensively and variously in the Brahmanical and Buddhist classical lores as the exotic and amorous celestial beings, accompanying various manifestations of Vishnu, Shiv and Buddh. Nevertheless, while the Brahmanical and Buddhist literary and art traditions remained complacent with the amorous idealism of the beautiful *Kinnar* danseuses, their music and the *kinnari-veena*, the Buddhist missionary adventurers possibly took the *Kinnars* seriously. They possibly established purposeful contacts with them. Under the aegis of Kanishk (CE 78-101), the Buddhist missionary activities extended far and wide in northwestern countries. According to the *Shan-Chien-Pi-Po-Sha*,<sup>7</sup>

specific penal provision (*prajika*) existed for a *bhikkhu*, who indulged in sex with a *Kinnari*. That provision may lend credence to the assumption that the Buddhist missionary monks were active in *Kinnar* territory (which possibly could be the present-day Kinnaur) as early as the CE 1<sup>st</sup> century or may be even earlier.<sup>8</sup>

However, here we are confronted with a ticklish problem about the real identity of the *Kinnar* and Kinnaura or the *Kinnari* and Kannaure. While until CE 5<sup>th</sup> century, the *Kinnars* appear as the mythical beings as at Ajanta, they are the mortal human beings, inhabiting the Himalayan interiors as early as CE 1<sup>st</sup> century during the Kushan age. How can these celestial and earthly identities be attributed to the same people? Possibly, the celestial *Kinnars*, associated with the Gandharvs and other mythical beings, belonged to the realm of exotic fantasy of the classical literature, whereas the *Kinnars*, associated with the Kirats, had been the ethnic communities in the inaccessible Himalayan interiors not only in the present-day Kinnaur, but in an extensive area. Thus, having been isolated from the mainstream, those were accorded an imaginary identity, as noted earlier.

On the other hand, there also exists a wandering community of



A Kinnauri belle – balancing the tradition and modernism.

Kinnari Jogi in Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan. The Kinnari Jogis earn their livelihood by singing their version of the *Ramayan* and *Mahabharat* and playing on a typical stringed instrument made of three gourds. Possibly, this stringed instrument of the Kinnari Jogis may be the *kinnari-veena* of the mythical *Kinnars*. No such stringed musical instrument is known to exist among the wide array of the traditional musical instruments in Kinnaur.

How far those Mahayanist Buddhist *bhikkhus* could succeed in their proselytising endeavours

among the inhabitants of Kinnaur may be a different question. Probably, being drawn away from the central source (Kashmir), the minimal impact that Buddhist monks registered on the people, withered away in the absence of adequate feedback, and the people dawdled to the old rut. The living traditional evidences indicate that the people of this area largely remained wedded to their age-old cults clustered around the nature and spirit worship. Those primitive faith-systems and dogmas are collectively defined as the *Bon-chos*. That belief system is now extinct in Kinnaur, but that has managed to survive precariously in many isolated pockets in Ladakh, and Lahul & Spiti district. No monastery or temple of that religion now exists. However, Francke identified an old and deserted *Bon-pa* temple below the Drigungpa monastery at Lamayuru in Ladakh.<sup>9</sup> I also discovered traces of obliterated murals done in black, blue and red pigments of the *Bon-chos* deities in one deserted temple in a small locality above Spillo in Kinnaur during my 1975 exploration. A modern and newly-built *Bon-pa* monastery, known as the Menri monastery, now stands at village Dolangi in Sirmaur district, 15 kilometres southeast of Solan.

Several centuries elapsed between the introduction of classical Mahayanic Buddhism of Kashmir and the Vajrayan Buddhism that proliferated in the trans-Himalayan kingdoms of Guge and Ladakh in the 10<sup>th</sup> century, which vaguely included most of the northeastern part of Kinnaur. However, there are various traditional evidences associated with the tantric exploits of Guru Padm-sambhav (CE c. 717-762), the great exponent of Vajrayan Buddhism, in Kinnaur and rest of Himachal Pradesh to suggest that the Vajrayan traditions had already found roots in Kinnaur and most parts of Himachal Pradesh years before his trans-Himalayan odyssey to the Central Tibetan kingdom in CE 747. Several places in Kinnaur have very fondly preserved those sacred traditions in the form of oral traditions, shrines and relics. Nako in the upper Kinnaur is one of such important places.

According to the local tradition prevalent around Nako village, Guru Padmsambhav is believed to have landed there from his flying tiger upon a rock. The impact of his landing caused his footprints (*rLob-dpon-zhabs-rje*) embossed on that blessed rock. Human footprints of more than human size may be seen imprinted

in relief on that natural rock. Later, a temple, called *zhabs-rjes lha-khang*, i.e., the temple enshrining footprints, was built over that sacred rock. That rock, enshrined in the village chapel at Nako, is still an object of worship for the people.

That chapel escaped notice during my first visit to Nako and I mistook the footmarks on the small protuberance of a living rock enclosed by flagstones, a little uphill from the village to be the Guru's footprints. However, during my subsequent visits to Nako, I learnt that those footmarks belonged to the Purgyal Devta, the guardian-deity of Nako, who resides on Leo Purgyal (or Pargail) summit (6,777 metres). Incidentally, the twin peaks, Leo Purgyal North Peak (6,777 metres) and Leo Purgyal South Peak (6,763 metres) located on the Zaskar range, are the highest mountain peaks in Himachal Pradesh.

Similar tradition exists at village Umla, a few kilometres east of Leh on the Indus in Ladakh, where the votive rock is known as the *bLa-ma-guru*. It is believed that Padmsambhav slept on that rock and left his impression on that rock.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, the footprint of Padmsambhav at Pokhar Dzong in Suru (Ladakh) is also an object of worship.

Incidentally, another tradition prevalent at Nako tells that a lama, named Chho Chhe Rimpoche (*Cho-che Rin-po-che*), a venerable title for Guru Padmsambhav, which means the 'Precious Teacher,' happened to visit that village sometime in the 8<sup>th</sup> century. He was fascinated by the mystic ambiance of the village and named that as *Nego*, which literally means 'a place of pilgrimage'. In the course of time, *Nego* changed into *Nako*. That legend may find a subtle connection with the legendary visit to this place of Guru Padmsambhav, who is revered by the Himalayan Buddhists as the *Guru Rimpoche* or the Precious Teacher. This folk traditions might have been inspired from a similar reference in the *Padma-bKai-Thang*, which tells that '*from the island on the Dhanakosha Lake in Uddiyana, he (Guru Padmsambhav) made his way through the heavens to Sahor*'.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, the legend of his landing at Nako may be regarded as an oral local *Terma* tradition inspired by the association of Guru Padmsambhav with Nako.

Francke ascribes the *rLob-dpon-zhabs-rje*, i.e., footprints and the *zhabs-rjes lha-khang*, i.e., temple enshrining them to the 11<sup>th</sup> century,

but the relics and the chapel, as these now exist, reveal much later date, having undergone repairs and restorations several times since Francke's visit. Yet, based on the circumstantial evidence, it may be said that the *zhabs-rjes lha-khang* should not have been of earlier than the 14<sup>th</sup> century, to which period most of the Padmsambhav legends inspired by the *Pad-ma bKai Thang* belong. The *Terma* tradition recorded in the *Pad-ma bKai Thang* is believed to have been discovered by Terchen Urgyan Kigpa, the pre-destined revealer, from the Crystal Rock Cave of Yarlung in CE 1326.<sup>12</sup> However, it may be suggested that prior to the supposed revelation of *Pad-ma bKai Thang*, the tradition associated with the exploits of Padmsambhav might have existed in the folklore of the area, and possibly that tradition found way into the *Terma* compendium. However, besides the votive rock, Nako is far more important for the complex of temples built by Rinchen Sangpo. Those temples have been discussed in the following chapter.

The Vajrayan system of Mahayanic Buddhism, which Padmsambhav developed by assimilating many diabolic gods and magical practices of the native origin, could find subtle receptivity among the folks. He could conveniently reach to the people through their demonic gods, whom he brought within the Vajrayan fold. Many of those fierce deities abnegated certain sanguinary sacrificial practices under that influence. If the folklore of Kinnaur is considered as an evidence, Dabala, Yulsa, Milayung, Tungma, Chakoling-Dambar, Talasa, Jan, Lamo (*Lha-mo*), Matthi, Yungmayung, etc. are such native deities of the Kinnaur who are known to have embraced Buddhism by Padmsambhav's enterprise years before the Himalayan (Tibetan) form of Buddhism proliferated in this part. Those powerful and violent gods have reigned supreme over the destiny of people. By winning them over to his creed by give-and-take strategy, he could purge the naive minds of the primitive dogmas and introduce some humanistic virtues among the people. However, that influence remained vigorous largely in the upper parts of Kinnaur district, where we find maximum number of indigenous deities who embraced Buddhism and where the maximum numbers of establishments belonging to his creed – the Nyingmapa – are located. Therefore, it is with valid reasons that one finds maximum concentration of the Nyingmapa estab-

lishments in the upper parts of Kinnaur and its periphery in the Pin valley than elsewhere in the Buddhist Western Himalayan region. Besides this, Guru Padmsambhav is a cult-deity in several other temples belonging to the other sects of the Himalayan Buddhism in Kinnaur.

What could have been the politico-administrative scenario of Kinnaur at that age is anybody's guess. However, as gleaned from the folk traditions, Kinnaur of that age was organised into many traditional administrative units, known as the *khoonds*,<sup>13</sup> i.e., the clan-based theocratic administrative units. Gerard has identified seven such units (*khoonds*) and their sub-units (*ghoris* and *dugris*) as: (1) Hangrang Tartars (with three *ghoris*: Nako, Chango, Hango), (2) Shooong or Shooe (with four *ghoris*: Gungel, Soomchoo, Zhungram, Yooshooong), (3) Tookpa (with four *ghoris*: Sgeenam, Reedung, Tangling, Kumroo), (4) Rasgramee (with two *ghoris*: Oorlee, Purlee), (5) Wangpo (with one *ghori*: Wangpo), (6) Uthara-bees (with four *ghoris*: Buree, Nalche, Grosnam, Trade), and (7) Pundrabees (with two *ghoris*: Roopee and Kambe).<sup>14</sup> However, the numbers and names of those *khoonds* are given differently by different authors. That may suggest that there existed number of *khoonds* beyond what the authors recorded. The theocratic nature of those *khoonds* is well established from the names of their presiding deities, furnished by Rahul Sankrityayan.<sup>15</sup> The towering castles that we find at various places in Kinnaur are the extant relics of that age. We find such structures in the Himalayan interiors at many places. That *khoond* institution might have continued for pretty long period until that was replaced by the *tthakaras* (or *tthakurai*) institution in Kinnaur.

The *Dharm* that Padmsambhav preached was apparently not much different from the then existing cult-systems, centered on the native demonic village deities of Kinnaur. In the scheme of his 'unreformed' religion, there was emphasis on the propitiation and appeasement of the demons in their fierce aspects, which also included several primitive sacraments. Therefore, the type of Buddhism that has come to stay in the major part of Kinnaur is in no way different to its primitive form that Padmsambhav propagated, and it is considerably different in practice to the one prevalent in Spiti, Ladakh and the rest of trans-Himalayan areas,

where the Himalayan Buddhism repeatedly underwent significant changes and modifications. The political imperatives, rather than any other factor, may be responsible for that stagnated situation in Kinnaur. For, at the time when the entire Tibetan Buddhist world was passing through religio-political convulsions under the ambitious Fifth Dalai Lama Ngawang Lopsang Gyatsho (CE 1617-1682), Kinnaur had become a part of the Hindu kingdom of Bushahr under the Tangmogang Treaty of CE 1665, as we shall see later.

### IN HISTORICAL TIMES

With the traditions associated with Padmsambhav and his magical exploits, the traditional account of Kinnaur as known from the classical lore comes to an end, and we enter into the historical times. However, nothing significant is historically known about Kinnaur, and what is given as the history of Kinnaur is, in fact, the feudal history of Bushahr state. However, the role of the people of Kinnaur in the formation, consolidation and economy of that state had been simply phenomenal from the very beginning. In fact, the name of that kingdom in the Satluj valley as Bushahr is a misnomer: no kingdom of that name existed until seventeenth century, when Kalyan Singh (CE 1607-1639) shifted his capital to a place, where a temple of Bashahr Devta still stands down in the valley. It was from the name of that deity that the kingdom came to be known as Bushahr. The capital he founded at that place was named as Kalyanpur after him. The interest of the ruler of Bushahr in Kinnaur had been of considerable strategic importance, for major part of revenue to the kingdom came from its wool trade with the trans-Himalayan wool marts through Kinnaur. Therefore, the rulers of Bushahr have always been at pains to maintain their hold on Kinnaur and to protect it from their powerful and ambitious neighbours in the west, north and northeast since early times.

From one tradition associated with the Kamru Fort in the Baspa (Sangla) valley, centuries ago, a Tibetan army invaded Baspa valley. The local chief and his subjects took shelter in the Kamru Fort, while the invaders pitched their camp on the hill overlooking the fort. As the tradition goes, the invaders sent emissaries in all



Inscribed Tibetan sword – a relic of Tibeto-Bushahri war.

directions to bring the local chieftains to their sides against their overlord. One of the envoys reached Chini to befriend its *tthakaras* (*tthakur* of the local chief), whom the raja of Bushahr had reduced to vassalage. Despite warning from the raja, the *tthakaras* of Chini joined the Tibetans. Another of the raja's subjects, a low-bred tailor, who lived close to the fort, leaked the secret of destroying the fort by dislodging the central beam of that structure. However, the missiles that the enemy fired on the fort were turned aside by the Goddess Kali, the presiding deity of the fort. Eventually, the invaders lifted the siege and retreated. The raja of Bushahr severely chastised the traitors and decreed that a man from Chini, called *Chinchang*, must present himself at the fort, duly escorted by a man from the adjoining village, on every triennial fair held in honour of the Goddess Kali at Kamru. That practice continues even today.<sup>16</sup> There are other traditions prevalent in lower Kinnaur to affirm hold of the Bushahr rulers over the Kinnaur valley, but all those traditions are as numerous and factitious as the genealogies of the rulers of Bushahr kingdom.

What was the politico-administrative situation of Kinnaur around the beginning of 10<sup>th</sup> century cannot be precisely visualized. Possibly, Kinnaur was fragmented into petty fiefdoms. Those fiefdoms were ruled by the petty chiefs, called *tthakaras* (*tthakurs* or chiefs). Even though, those *tthakaras* functioned as the autonomous chiefs, yet they were subordinate either to the Western Tibetan kingdom of Guge or to the Bushahr kingdom. From the available scattered references in the historical records of the neighbouring kingdoms and a few inscriptional evidences, it is sugges-



ted that the upper part of Kinnaur was ruled by petty chiefs (*tthakaras*, i.e., the *tthakurs* or chiefs), who owed their allegiance to the vast Western Tibetan kingdom of Guge that sKyi-de-nima-gon formed by annexing and consolidating petty trans-Himalayan kingdoms and principalities. Spiti, which also included upper part of Kinnaur, and Lahul also formed parts of that unified Guge kingdom.<sup>17</sup> The subsequent political developments facilitated further expansion of the Guge kingdom. Thus, under Lhachen Yeshe-O (CE c. 967-1040), it extended over Zanskar-Spiti.<sup>18</sup> From the inscriptional evidences that Francke discovered at Tabo (Spiti) and Poo (Kinnaur), it is proved that the Guge kingdom of that age also included the upper part of Kinnaur as well.<sup>19</sup> Obviously, the petty chiefdoms of lower Kinnaur, ruled by different *tthakaras*, were the tributaries to Bushahr.

Lhachen Yeshe-O, the saint-ruler of Guge, was responsible for extending wholehearted patronage to the institutional Buddhism in his vast kingdom and peripheral areas as far as Hobulangka (the present-day Hobu or Chini) and dPag (the Gru-dpag in the Baspa valley), both in lower Kinnaur. In that enterprise, the name of Rinchen Sangpo emerges profoundly. For details on this aspect, refer 5<sup>th</sup> chapter.

Probably, while the upper part of Kinnaur continued to be under the vassalage of Guge for many centuries, the *tthakaras* in lower Kinnaur formed the tributaries of the Bushahr rulers, who had their capital at Kamru. They are known to have shifted their capital from Kamru to Sarahan around 10<sup>th</sup> century on the strategic consideration, possibly fearing the presence of Ladakhis or Tibetans closer to them. Sarahan continued to be the capital of Bushahr kingdom until Senge Namgyel (CE c. 1590-1635), who emerged as the most ambitious and powerful *gyelpo* of the Ladakh kingdom in the Western Tibet. He stormed over the principalities and kingdoms in all directions and ruthlessly brought them under his yoke to realise his dream of making an empire. He extended his empire from Skardu in the west to the bank of Nar beyond Kailash (*Ti-se*) in the east and down into the Satluj valley up to Wangtu in Kinnaur.<sup>20</sup> Thus, entire Kinnaur was devolved to Ladakh.

Kalyan Singh (CE 1607-1639) was the reigning king of Bushahr kingdom at that juncture. Finding a powerful and ambitious *gyelpo*

closer to his capital, he thought it expedient to shift his capital from Sarahan to a safer distance down in the valley and to consolidate his territory. Therefore, he shifted the capital of his kingdom from Sarahan to a place near the temple of Bashahru Devta down in the valley, which he named as Kalyanpur. It was after the name of god Bashahru that the kingdom came to be known as Bashahr or Bushahr.<sup>21</sup> What was the name of that kingdom prior to that is anybody's guess. Later, Ram Singh (CE c. 1767-1799) shifted the capital of Bushahr to the present-day town, which he named after his name as Rampur.

Kehari Singh (CE 1639-1696), who succeeded Kalyan Singh to the throne of Bushahr was a powerful and ambitious ruler. During his reign, Kinnaur (*Khunu*) emerged prominently in the trans-Himalayan political arena with a wider socio-cultural and religious ramifications that impacted not only Western Tibetan kingdoms but also the Central Tibetan lamadom.

It so happened that at that juncture Tibet was passing through the throes of bitter and sanguinary sectarian conflicts between the influential old and the reformed schools – the Nyingmapa and the Gelukpa – of Buddhism. Each of them had been trying hard to woo the Mongol prince Gusari Khan for military help against the other. However, the Fifth Grand Lama of Gelukpa, Ngawang Lopsang Gyatsho (1617-1682), was a very clever strategist. He manoeuvred the circumstances so skilfully that with the support of Gusari Khan, he emerged as the spiritual and temporal head of Tibet with the honorific Mongolian title of *dalai*, which means the 'Ocean', under the Mongol sovereignty. That was the most momentous event in the history of Central Asia that was to cast long and deep shadows on the happenings in Ladakh and rest of the Buddhist Western Himalay for centuries to come. After the death of Gusari Khan in CE 1655, the position of Dalai Lama became very strong and he asserted his might to bring all other Buddhist sects in and around Tibet under his yoke.

The situation became very inflammatory, when the Fifth Dalai Lama, Ngawang Lopsang Gyatsho, attempted to proselytize Bhutan kingdom to the Gelukpa from the Dugpa Buddhism, which was very firmly established in that kingdom. Since, a reincarnation of the Head Lama of Dugpa in Bhutan was once discovered in the

royal family of Zangla in Ladakh, people of Bhutan and Ladakh felt very close to each other on the spiritual plane. Obviously, the people of Ladakh felt hurt by that interference of Ngawang Lopsang Gyatsho in the religious affairs of Bhutan. Lhachen Delak Namgyel (CE c. 1645-1680) was reigning *gyelpo* of Ladakh at that juncture. Urged by that relationship, the *gyelpo* wrote to the Lhasa government to reconcile with Bhutan. However, that missive evoked prompt and stern response from Lhasa.

Before Delak Namgyel could actualize his warning, the Tibeto-Mongol combined force mounted an attack on Ladakh under a Mongol lama Ganden Tshewangpel Sangpo (Lama Sang). Around that time, Kehari Singh (CE c. 1639-1696) was the ruler of the Bushahr state. He was keenly watching the happenings in the trans-Himalayan neighbourhood, for he not only wanted to recover the northern part of his kingdom, i.e., Kinnaur, which Senge Namgyel had annexed to Ladakh, but also to secure unobstructed trading facility for the trans-Himalayan commodities, in which wool ranked foremost, for the economic viability of his kingdom largely depended on that trade. The unstable condition in that region had considerably affected the trade activities in Bushahr, and that obviously was a matter of great concern for him.

Therefore, Kehari Singh lost no time to settle score with Ladakh and wrest his territory. To muster support for his mission, he solicited help from the neighbouring petty chiefs (the *Attharah Tthakurais*), but to no avail. Ultimately, he mustered his Kinnauri troops and marched towards Mansarovar overtly on pilgrimage, but he covertly wanted to join issue with the Tibetans. Kehari Singh met the Tibetan commander at Puling Changthang in the northern part of Guge. That meeting ended into a historic friendship treaty between Tibet and Bushahr, which, though erroneously came to be known as the Namgia Treaty (because Francke discovered that document at Namgia). That treaty proclaimed:

“Until the snow melts on the Mount Kailash, the sacred Lake Manasarovar turns empty, the crow turns white and the present epoch ends, our friendship shall last.”

That treaty also provided for the improvement of trade and transit relations between Bushahr and Tibet. Executed in the Bhoti,

that treaty was edited and translated by Luciano Petech as follows:

"Om Svasti. In this territory of Lhasa, land of the Noble Religion, before the lotus-like feet of the Exalted Government protecting the great country according to religion, (the following statement) is submitted. Formerly since the old times, the two kings upper and lower (It is difficult to get at the exact meaning of this expression repeatedly used in the document. It may possibly indicate the kingdoms of the Central Tibet and Bushahr – Author)) were showing the conditions of (those who do) good works desiring the best. Such being (the state of affairs), at the time when at the beginning mNa-ris sKor-gsum was subject to the Jo-bdag-po of Guge, it was conquered by the king of Ladakh. It was allowed to collect victuals (or custom duties?) equally in the transit between (?) Bashahr and Ladakh (comprising) mNa-ris, Mar-yul (Ladakh) and Mar-stab (unidentifiable)"

"At that time the official of the Government, dGa-ldan Tshe-dbang got some writings containing prophecies of Devadaka. These said:"

"If now you march as the commander of an army toward mNa-ris, and Mar-yul will come in your power." The official dGa-ldan Tshe-dbang accordingly marched as commander of an army toward mNa-ris.

"At the time of sKyer Singh, Raja of Bashahr in the frontier country 25 kings and 18 chieftains were summoned for military service, but there was nobody who came thither. Raja sKyer Singh thought that he ought to go and bathe himself in the Manasarovar lake, and he went there. The Government official dG-ldan Tshe-dban and the Raja of Bashahr sKyer Singh, at Puling-dang of Guge in Zang-Zung, the two kings upper and lower had a meeting. At that time, calling to witness Guru Mahamuni was proclaimed (?) the firm agreement reached by the two kings upper and lower, to act with the golden good intention (?) of the good works. According to it:"

"Till the Kailasa of the white snows, palace of the Lord of the three times, navel of the Jambudvipa, will

melt; till the great lake Manasarovar will empty itself; till the feathers of the winged black raven will become white; till the Kalpa will change; in order that the actions within the circuit of the borders of the two most noble upper and lower kings, who must completely protect the good path of release (consisting in) the good works, may become the means (for obtaining) the happiness of the creatures; since it is necessary to allow the passage of messengers, couriers and envoys appointed by the two kings upper and lower, the word is completely binding (?). It is necessary that in a period of three years messengers from Bashahr should be sent and made to stay in the capital mNa-ri-rdon (Gartok?), at Tsaparang in Purang. Ruthog and gZung-sgar (? unknown). The messengers of the two kings, upper and lower, wherever they go upwards or downwards in that period of time, must not be molested even by a hair with taxes or anything of the sort. The two kings, upper and lower, have shown the proper conditions for the Path of Release, (consisting in) good works, without worries about cups of poison or murderous weapons."

"At that time the soldiers of the Government officials dGa-ldan Tshe-dbang and the soldiers of sKyer Singh Raja of Bashahr assembled at the same moment. The army was drawn up against the king of Ladakh. (There were) the camps of the Government officials; dGa-ldan Tshe-dbang and of the Bashahr minister acting as general. At the place called Go-ro in Ladakh there were the tent (for the general) and the caves (for the soldiers). At Leh in Ladakh the soldiers called frontiersmen Kashmiris and Balti (and) Sam-ma met and massed themselves with the three divisions in the uppermost part (?)"

"dGa-ldan Tshe-dbang thought: "The doubt arises in me whether I shall conquer or not Mar-yul and Mar-stab." He tied a white scarf to the extremity of the tail....(? zi-wa is a word unknown to the dictionaries) of the stallion of Sel-dkar, and then uttered the following prayer: "If mNa-ris sKor-gsum will come in my prayer, may also the horse of Sel-dkar return back." At that time the official dGa-ldan Tshe-dban became pleased in his mind."

"At that time the minister of Bashahr and the Government chief governor Don-agrub, these two together, appeared in the camp and gave secretly fifteen loads of gold and silver to the frontiersmen; and the frontiersmen returned to their countries. Then the king of Ladakh was subjugated by the (Lhasa) government and Bashahr."

"In this manner mNa-ris sKor-gsum has become subject to the Government. (More) completely and clearly this is set forth in the registers of the Government and in the great list of Bashahr."

"At that time the official dGa-ldan Tshe-dbang had already gone to the capital (?). Afterwards, this was kept secret by saying that dGa-ldan Tshe-dbang was in spiritual seclusion. His official duties were discharged by the private secretary dPal-bzang."

"From the old times till now 13 royal generations have passed. The righteous Raja of Bashahr has never been wilfully unfaithful and never even by a hair departed from his pledged word. The above-mentioned (arrangement in vigour) from antiquity till now has a great usefulness for the Teaching. And since it is so even today; we beg that thus it may not be changed."<sup>22</sup>

After initial resistance, the harassed *gyelpo* took shelter in the Tangmogang Fort. The invaders laid siege on the fort and the hapless *gyelpo* was obliged to approach Emperor Aurangzeb Alamgir (CE 1658-1707) through Ibrahim Khan, the Mughal *subedar* of Kashmir (from CE 1678 to 1685) for military aid, which was granted. Fearing advancing Mughal army under Fidai Khan (son of Ibrahim Khan), Lama Sang abandoned the Tangmogang Fort and organised his men to face the Mughal-Ladakhi combine in the plains of Chargyal. The Tibeto-Kinnauri troops were completely routed in the fierce fighting. However, the *gyelpo* had to pay heavily for the help he got from the Mughals.<sup>23</sup> On the other hand, the action of the *gyelpo* – seeking intervention of foreign power to settle his dispute with Lhasa – was strongly resented by the Lhasa Government, which mounted army pressure on Ladakh to bring it to term. Consequently, the Fifth Dalai Lama Ngawang Lopsang Gyatsho deputed Lama Mephram Wangpo, the *kushok* of a Dugpa

monastery, as a plenipotentiary to the *gyelpo* for reconciliation. The *kushok* and *gyelpo* met at Tangmogang and signed a friendship treaty between Tibet and Ladakh about CE 1665. Probably, the representative of Bushahr was also a signatory to that treaty, as may be inferred from the mural in a small royal sanctum in front of the palace at Rampur, in which that event is depicted.<sup>24</sup> That treaty, besides other terms, provided facilities in trans-border trade between Ladakh, Bushahr and Tibet. That treaty not only ushered in an era of friendship between the three neighbouring kingdoms, Ladakh, Tibet and Bushahr, but also resulted into the establishment of matrimonial relations.

For the help that Kehari Singh extended to the Tibetan commander, he got back Kinnaur area in dowry on marrying a princess of Guge, probably a daughter of Ashog De. That area had been in the possession of Ladakh since the reign of Senge Namgyel. The princess of Guge became known as Guge Rani in Bushahr. Raja Kehari Singh built an imposing palace for her at village Sapni. That castle-like imposing palace, popularly known as the *Guge Rani ki Kothi*, is an excellent monument of the Indo-Tibetan architecture. Though, in a state of neglect, it still stands in dignified aloofness at that village.

The effect of aforementioned two treaties – the Namgia Treaty (Puling Changthang Treaty) and Tangmogang Treaty – was enormous for the economic stability of Bushahr kingdom. The Bushahri (Kinnauri) traders were immensely benefited from the open border trading facilities with Ladakh and Tibet in various exotic commodities, especially the fine wool and fleece. Eventually, Rampur, the capital headquarters of Bushahr kingdom emerged as an international market for fleece and wool and other Himalayan exotic commodities. The Kinnauras were the major players in that trade. The wool overwhelmingly impacted politics of the Himalayan kingdoms of Bushahr and Kullu and the collateral trans-Himalayan kingdoms.

With the exception of invasion of Spiti in CE 1776, when the Bushahris (Kinnauras) are known to have invaded Spiti and grabbed the territory up to Dhankar Fort and kept it under their possession for two years,<sup>25</sup> Kinnaur remained on the sidelines of political history of the region for quite sometime. The reason of

occupation of that fort might have been the exaction of tribute. In fact, Spiti had been under the exploitative control of Ladakh, Tibet, Kullu and Bushahr, each exercising its authority on it to exact tribute in kind, mostly wool and blankets. In fact, the main concern for the Bushahri rulers was its trans-border trade. As long as that went smoothly, the Bushahris (Kinnauras) remained contented.

The relations between Ladakh and Kullu remained fluidal; at times taking unsavoury turn. However, the Kinnauras wisely avoided meddling into those affairs despite the simmering distrust that persisted in the relations between the Ladakhis and Bushahris (Kinnauras) even in their trade dealings. Even then, the Kinnauras avoided direct confrontation with Ladakh until Tshepel Tundup Namgyal (CE c. 1790-1841) became the *gyelpo* of Ladakh. Pusillanimous and imbecile, as he was, he proved to be a very timid ruler. Of that situation, Kullu (*Nunti*) took maximum advantage, making the export of shawl-wool an issue. On that pretext, Kullu repeatedly invaded Spiti – a tributary of Ladakh. In one of such invasive forays sometime before CE 1822, Kinnaur (*Khunu*) and Lahul (*dKarzva*) also joined Kullu (*Nunti*). They unitedly invaded Zaskar, destroyed forts, plundered the royal palace at Padum, desecrated *gompas* and devastated the area. The invaders carried away yaks, ponies and other property.

From the foregoing discussion, it may be revealed that the commercial interests, especially related to the import of wool and fleece, have largely been at the root of all troubles between different principalities and kingdoms on both side of the border. The self-content and peace-loving people of Kinnaur avoided any confrontation with their neighbours until their inter-border trading interests were infringed, for that has been the main support of their survival. Secondly, the revenue income from the inter-border trade was the main source of income for Bushahr. Obviously, whenever the trading interests of the people of Kinnaur were jeopardised, the people of Kinnaur rallied en masse under their king to resist such attempt. Interestingly, in all such actions, the other tributaries of Bushahr rulers remained passive, because of their disinterest in those affairs. How all that came about, may help us in understanding the feudalistic concerns of Bushahri rulers and the British colonial imperatives in the inter-border politics.



## WOOL POLITICS IN INTER-BORDER TRADE

Wool has been the major source of revenue income for the rulers of Bushahr. The contribution of the people of Kinnaur in producing fine wool from their sheep and goats and importing it from the distant trans-Himalayan and Central Asian markets has been very crucial for the economy of Bushahr kingdom. They have been importing numerous exotic Tibetan commodities to the Rampur market and carrying Indian commodities to the trans-Himalayan markets on their *goonaths* since ages. In that process, not only the rulers of Bushahr had been earning handsome revenue, but the Kinnaura traders have also been earning their livelihood from that trade. Thus, inter-border trade had been the mainstay for the people of Kinnaur and an economic necessity for the rulers of Bushahr until the mid-twentieth century. In Bushahr, it was partly consumed by the local looms, but most of the imported wool was exported to the down-country markets. The importers of Bushahr always thought it prudent to export the quality wool at much higher profits than to consume it locally. For their looms, the local weavers largely depended on the local production. It is for that reason that the weaving could not develop as a regular industry, but only as a leisure-time domestic activity on the traditional lines.

The very survival of Rampur town – the capital of Bushahr state – depended on that trans-border trade. It was essentially planned as a trading capital by its rulers, and with that intention, the rulers of Bushahr populated it with the immigrant traders from the places around Ambala. Those traders acted as a link for the export of the exotic Kinnauri and trans-Himalayan commodities to the mainland centres and import commodities from the mainland for the trans-Himalayan consumption. The state was benefited both ways in importing and exporting business. The Kinnaura traders have throughout acted as the vital link in that transaction.

In fact, the trans-Himalayan and Central Asian region has been the producer of the finest quality of wool and fleece not only from the domestic caprine and ovine stocks, but also from the wild species of the trans-Himalayan mountain sheep and goats, known as the *shapo* (*Ovis orientalis*), *argali* (*Ovis ammon*), *bharal* (*Pseudois nayaur*), etc. The nature has gifted to these wild animals a coat of

fine wool and fleece beneath the rough outer hair to survive under the severe alpine conditions. These animals rub their bodies against the wild shrubs and rocks, leaving fine fleece on them in that process. The trans-Himalayan shepherd dogs are also known to grow fine quality of fleece.<sup>26</sup> The extreme fineness of the fleece obtained from those animals is attributed to the severe arid and alpine conditions in the trans-Himalayan heights of their habitat. The Drokpa shepherds, who roam about with their quadruped wealth over the steppes in search of greener pastures, have been carefully picking up that fleece from shrubs and rocks. They have been bartering that fleece with the Ladakhi, Lahula and Kinnaura traders during the annual *hats* (i.e., the defined places where trading takes place periodically) for their necessities. Therefore, to gain supremacy over the trade imports of the exotic commodities, especially the wool, from the trans-Himalayan and Central Asian marts, the rulers of different kingdoms and principalities of this region have been vying with each other. At times, the situation became acrimonious, leading to skirmishes among traders from different states, who would enter Tibet in groups duly escorted. A situation of 'cold war', thus, always loomed large over the inter-state relations of the Indian border kingdoms and petty chiefdoms on that account.

The largest beneficiary of the wool import had been Kashmir since the times of Sikandar Butshikan Sultan (CE 1389-1413), who, after having defeated the Western Tibet (Little Tibet), probably had secured monopoly on the wool import under a treaty. However, that situation had become a cause of anxiety for the other collateral Indian states and principalities. That situation had been irksome particularly for the petty fiefdoms (*lthakaras*) in Kinnaur or the kingdom that existed at that juncture, which later became known as the Bushahr state. For, the age-old traditional trade-relations that the people of Kinnaur had with the Western Tibet were adversely affected and the Kinnaura traders could get only the second grade and discarded stuff. Therefore, whenever the trading interests of Kashmir, Tibet, Ladakh, Kullu and Bushahr clashed, the fights were inevitable.

Thus, when the ambitious *gyelpo* of Ladakh Senge Namgyel (CE c. 1590-1635) annexed entire Kinnaur area to his kingdom, the

Bushahr kingdom under Kalyan Singh (CE 1607-1639) was doomed to the severe economic crises and insecurity. That crises lingered until his successor, Kehari Singh (CE 1639-1696) tactfully regained the lost territory by joining hands with the Tibetans against Ladakh. Interestingly, none of his vassals of *Attharah Tthakurais*, but the Kinnauras actively supported Kehari Singh in that venture, for they had their interests at stake. Bushahr never had its regular force. In case of urgency, the able-bodied men were requisitioned from different fiefdoms on the pattern of compulsory regimentation similar to *begar*. Thus, more often than not they were not loyal to the king, and whenever their supplies exhausted, they deserted at will. The only reliable soldiers on whom the rulers of Bushahr could depend were the Kinnauras, and at that juncture also the Kinnaura men rose to the occasion.<sup>27</sup> That situation transformed the entire socio-political scenario of Kinnaur, as already noted.

On the conclusion of that treaty, the border between Bushahr and Guge kingdoms was thrown open and the symbiotic trade started once again. Sheep and goats, laden with mercantile items, started moving across the border from both sides, with Gartok in Tibet as the rendezvous for the international business. The Kinnaura traders were the main players in the whole show. To encourage import of wool and fleece, Raja Kehari Singh introduced three seasonal trade fairs. Although, he had his capital at Kalyanpur, yet he chose a spacious tableland downstream on the left bank of Satluj as a fair ground. It was that place, which his later successor Ram Singh (CE c. 1767-1799) developed into the capital of Bushahr state, and got businessmen of Raipur-Rani in Haryana settled there in order to boost up the mercantile activities. That capital-place came to be known as Rampur after the name of its founder. The main fair, held in the month of November, came to be called *Loi*, the other held in the month of January-February, was known as *Dhal*, and the third, held in the month of May, was called *Loi Jeth*. In common, all those fairs were called *Lois* or *Lavis* after the principal item of trade between the two kingdoms, i.e., wool (*loi* in the local dialect). However, *loi* not only means wool, but also the male-shawl made of *pasham*, i.e., fine wool. Later, when regular mule-road in the Satluj valley, connecting Tibetan wool-

mart in Gartok with the Indian mainland, was constructed, the Lavi fair became an annual affair to be celebrated in the month of November from 11<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> for four days.

However, better trade contacts between Western Tibet and Bushahr caused consternation in Kashmir, where huge revenue income was accruing to the government from the woollen textile industry, based on wool imported from Central Asia and Tibet and from the import itself. Therefore, export of wool from Tibet to Bushahr was a cause of indignation for them despite the fact that Bushahr was in no way rival to Kashmir as far as the wool-based textile industry was concerned. There hardly was any wool-based industry in Bushahr at that age, and among the people of Bushahr, only the Kinnauras could consume an insignificant part of the Tibetan wool in their domestic handicrafts, especially for the reason that Kinnaur itself has been a producer of wool for its domestic consumption. The fine wool that it imported from across the border was exported at a much higher price, along with the local surplus, to the *mandis* in the mainland through the Lavi trade-fairs. Nevertheless, Kashmir could not afford to see any other outlet point for the Tibetan wool, which was the mainstay of its shawl industry.

In fact, by tradition the fine wool (*lena*) and fleece (*byangi*) of Tibet went to Kashmir through Ladakh in pursuance of an existing ancient pact. Ladakh held monopoly over the shawl-wool trade of Tibet under a treaty concluded at Gtin-sgan in CE 1650 between Ladakh and Tibet, which specifically provided for cession of all territories east of Lhari stream at Demchok by Ladakh to Tibet in lieu of important trade concessions, including the monopoly of shawl-wool trade for Ladakh and thence to Kashmir.<sup>28</sup>

Thus, Bushahr remained deprived of the open purchase of Tibetan wool, and the Kinnaura had been smuggling it to their country "in small quantities of two and three pounds each person" at the risk of confiscation, as Moorcroft (c. 1821-23) suggests.<sup>29</sup> However, none of the contending parties objected to that clandestine traffic because, only a little of the total export from Tibet went to Bushahr, and Kashmir continued to monopolize the wool-trade in Tibet. Further, it was ordinarily not possible for Kashmir to check smuggling of wool to Bushahr because of geographical constraints.

Besides, the people living on both sides of the Tibeto-Bushahr border belonged to the same ethnicity, and had traditional relations. Thus, they could move across without any restriction and carry wool and other commodities unchecked. Therefore, Kashmir had to feel contended with the status-quo.

However, the import of wool from Ladakh and Tibet to Bushahr plummeted grievously when the Gurkhas temporarily occupied Bushahr between CE 1810 and 1815. The invaders had advanced up to the Chholtu Bridge in lower Kinnaur, plundering places and terrorising people. Under that insecure condition, the inter-border trade was completely stopped. However, the Gurkha occupation of Bushahr between was not only the reason for that crises: an outbreak of epidemic among goats in Ladakh and neighbouring Western Tibet in the beginning of 19<sup>th</sup> century was more responsible for that situation.

The British Government of India was very well aware of the strategic and commercial importance of the border kingdoms in the Western Himalayan region. It also had its high stakes in exploiting the commercial possibilities of the Tibetan and Central Asian wool-trade. However, it avoided direct involvement in the affair lest it should offend Kashmir. The request from the then ruler of Bushahr, Raja Ugar Singh (CE 1736-1810) for help, anticipating Gurkha invasion followed by the actual occupation of the kingdom in the same year, provided the much awaited opportunity for the British to enter in the Western Himalayan theatre. The Gurkhas were repulsed from Bushahr territory in CE 1815 by the British intervention, and Mahender Singh (CE 1815-1850), who was still a minor, was installed as the ruler. Under the British paramountcy, the borders of Bushahr extended to Ladakh and Guge in Western Tibet. One of the conditions of the *sanad*, which conferred rulership on Raja Mahender Singh under the British, provided that the state shall make available *begar* (mandatory labour) for the construction of roads in the kingdom to ensure free flow of imports from Tibet. Consequently, while up to CE 1818, even foot-tracks were not available in the kingdom, trains of pack goats and sheep loaded with wool, fleece and other commodities started reaching at Rampur from Tibet and Central Asian centres along the newly-laid bridle road for the British government.<sup>30</sup> That achievement was

a sheer enterprise of the people of Kinnaur, who sweat hard to cut path through perilous cliffs. Alexander Gerard records that:

"The Koonawurees also find in it to their advantage to extend their commerce in wool, and have lately been improving some of the most frequenting roads through their country. This last year I noticed several places that were formerly scarcely practicable for travellers, which had been repaired so as to be passable with some difficulty by loaded sheep, several of which were brought in 1820 in Rampur. A few of them were lost by tumbling down precipices; but the people told me they intend to make the roads better, although they would require much time and frequent repair, from being destroyed by the felling rocks."<sup>31</sup>

In order to encourage export of shawl-wool to the British territory and therefrom to England, a government agency was established at Kotgarh in CE 1820, but that arrangement did not work due to the unwilling attitude of the local people.<sup>32</sup> However, increased inter-border trade activities between Bushahr and Tibet encouraged by the British patronage had detrimental effect on the customary import of quality wool from Tibet to Kashmir, then under the Sikh rule between CE 1834 and 1841. Therefore, the Sikh *wazeer* General Zoravar Singh issued severe edict to the Tibetan traders to honour the earlier practice of selling the shawl-wool only to the Ladakhi traders. He imposed severe restrictions on the 'Traders Guild' that exported wool and fleece to Bushahr. Those who defied that edict were hauled up, and the Kinnaura traders of Bushahr and those from other British protected kingdoms, who used to smuggle wool and fleece were subjected to very severe punishments.<sup>33</sup> In one instance, even five Kinnaura traders were done to death for defying his orders. While he eschewed any direct action against Bushahr lest the British troops stationed at Sabathu in the lower Shimla hills were driven into fray on the pretext of protecting Bushahri interests in Tibet, the British Government prudently offered higher price for the Tibetan wool through the Kinnaura traders that allured the Tibetan traders to sell it surreptitiously to the Kinnaura traders. Thus, the age-old Tibeto-Kashmiri trade-pact was grossly violated to the great discomfiture of Sikh government and the Ladakhi traders. Consequently, a major bulk

of Tibetan wool was being clandestinely diverted to Bushahr markets through different unguarded routes, and the British were taking full advantage of that import at Bushahr. J.D. Cunningham collected statistics of the import of wool from Western Tibet to Bushahr between CE 1837 and 1841. He noted that under the insecure conditions in Kashmir, 1080 *mans* (432 quintals) of fine wool valued at rupees 55,529 arrived in Bushahr in CE 1837 which quantity increased to 1840 *mans* (736 quintals) amounting to rupees 1,09,807 in CE 1840.<sup>34</sup> The Tibeto-Bushahri trade flourished.

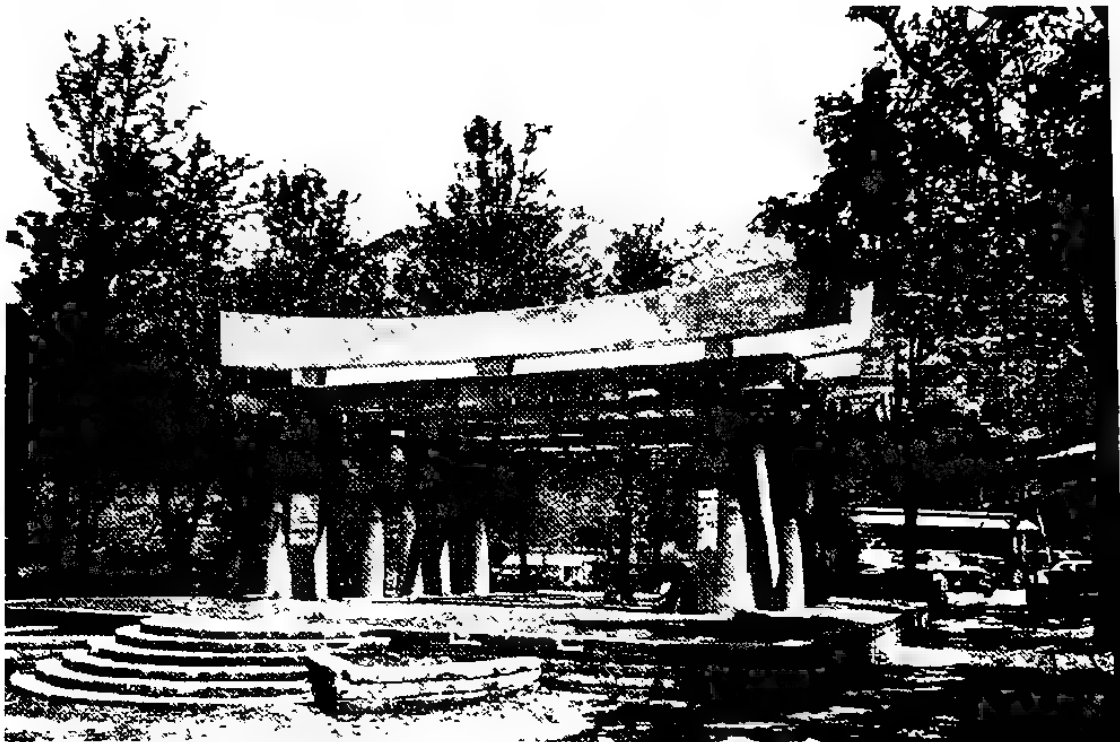
However, the killing of Kinnaura traders had very deterrent effect on the import: it fell abruptly in CE 1841, when only 169 *mans* (67.60 quintals) of wool and fleece could reach Bushahr.<sup>35</sup>

In order to attract import of Tibetan wool to Bushahr, the British Government impressed upon its ruler to undertake certain measures based on the report prepared by J.D. Cunningham on the import and export trade on the data that he collected during his sojourn in Bushahr from CE 1837 to 1841. He suggested revoking of transit duty in order to encourage inter-border trade between Bushahr and Tibet, and in CE 1847 it was revoked.<sup>36</sup> That measure considerably reduced the revenue income of Bushahr state, but the British Government compensated that by reducing the tribute amount of rupees 15,000 for defraying the expenses of force maintained by it to rupees 3,945. Abolition of transit duty attracted more Tibetan wool into Bushahri markets and the wool-based cottage industry in the entire state was benefited in general. However, the main beneficiaries were the people of Kinnaur, for not only the entire inter-border trade was monopolised by them, but also the wool-based handicrafts in Kinnaur developed so much that those formed a class by themselves. Colourful Kinnauri blankets, *gudmas*, mufflers and other textile items stocked the Bushahri markets and the annual fair of Lavi looked more colourful and well-stocked with wool and wool-products.

He also suggested to the British Government that "a road should be carried from the tableland of Tibet to the plains of India, and the transport of merchandise be simplified and rendered secure."<sup>37</sup> Accordingly, in the 1850s, work on the Wool Road from the Western Tibetan border to Shimla was taken up. Thus, the caravans of *goontths* (Tibetan ponies), goats and sheep laden with

wool and other commodities could safely reach Bushahr *mandis* from Tibet, and further transported to the Indian markets. That road eventually came to be known as the Hindustan-Tibet road. How important this road has been for the economic development of the people of Kinnaur and Spiti and for the defence of country hardly needs any explanation.

With those free and secure inter-border trade facilities to the Kinnaura traders besides the wool, other exotic commodities started coming to the Bushahr *mandis* from Tibet. Among those were sheep, *numdas*, carpets, blankets, salt, borax, *chowries*, felt, silk, tea,



Labourers' memorial at Jeori in memory of the workers who died in the construction of Hindustan-Tibet road.

leather, sulphur, musk, chinaware, coral, amber, etc. Among the items of export to Tibet, notable ones were mules, woodenware, cotton fabrics, grains, dried fruits, brassware and spices. To ensure fair dealing between the Kinnaura and Tibetan traders, a 'Traders Guild', constituted of the traders from Kinnaur (Bushahr) and Tibet existed at Gartok since very old time. That Guild remained functional until late fifties of the present century when, after the Indo-Chinese war, the border between India and Tibet was sealed. That 'Traders Guild' had powers even to settle matters of 'life and



death'. It fixed trade-rates, and all the disputes arising between the traders were referred to it.<sup>38</sup> The Kinnaura traders belonging to the *parganas* of Tukpa, Shua and Shalkar in upper Kinnaur had traditional trading rights with Tibet. The traders of those *parganas* used to go to Tibet in groups, duly escorted against the highway robbers, and transact business with their own traditionally defined Tibetan counterparts at Gartok. Each of the Kinnauri trader-groups was allotted a defined place in Tibet, where it could conduct its trade. Accordingly, the Tukpa group confined itself to the villages of Gyanam, Kangsang, Gianma, Murbhang, Dubgya and Marbuk. The Shua group was allotted Chhang, Rodu, Sangmang, Ladakh, Machang Gianma and Mongpa. The traders' group of Shalkar was earmarked the area of Cho-Chalang and Chang-Gialang, but it was generally free to trade with any one of the Tibetan counterpart, because, it is said that Shalkar was a part of Gartok district, which once belonged to the Bushahr kingdom.<sup>39</sup>

With the brisk import of quality wool from Tibet, the *pashmina* shawl industry in Bushahr flourished, but the main beneficiaries were the Kinnauras, for the weaving has been their traditional and most popular domestic handicraft. The woollen shawls of Kinnaur became famous for their silky smoothness and warmth. Some families of the traditional Kinnaura weavers also settled at Rampur. Thus, being produced by the Kinnaura weavers at Rampur and being marketed there, those products were popularly known as the Rampuri *chaddars*. The villages of Sannam and Kanam in Kinnaur had earned the reputation of producing thick, white and fleecy *gudmas*.

However, around the early decades of 20<sup>th</sup> century, the shawl industry of Bushahr received a setback. Although, the shawls of good quality were being produced at Rampur, but those were said to be inferior to those being produced at Sabathu, Ludhiana, Amritsar and elsewhere in Punjab from the wool imported from Tibet. The finest *pasham* imported from Tibet by the Kinnaura traders was sold off raw by them at higher profits to the merchants from the down country during the Lavi fair, and only the discarded stuff was left out for the local consumption. Hence, only poor quality shawls were available at Rampur. Wool, *pasham*, sheep and goats continued to be the chief items of import from Tibet during

the following years also. In 1913-14, wool worth rupees 1,31,760 and *pasham* valued at rupees 65,260 were imported from Tibet and in 1914-15, 3,279 maunds (1,312 quintals) of wool worth rupees 1,14,305, and 857 maunds (343 quintals) of *pasham* costing rupees 53,580 and 1217 heads of goats and sheep valued at rupees 3,651 were imported.<sup>40</sup>

The British temptation in influencing the inter-border trade between India and Tibet continued to mount until the British Government of India succeeded in establishing a British Trade Agency at Gartok under the Anglo-Tibetan Trade Regulation of 1914. However, relations between the British Trade Agent at Gartok and the Western Tibetan Government remained strained. The Garpon (Governor-General) at Gartok, who represented the Dalai Lama's Central Government of Lhasa, was reluctant to admit presence of the British Agent in their court. Whenever the suits pertaining to the British subjects (Indian traders) in Gartok came to his consideration, it was alleged that the Garpon handed over injustice. The Jongpon (Governor) of Rudok, a district-town and a trade-centre north of the Indus, had imposed ten percent duty on the Bushahri (Kinnaura) traders. They also felt insecure under the Jongpon's oppressive administration. On the other hand, the Garpon of Gartok had imposed a tax of only two percent on the Ladakhi traders. All those actions of Jongpon and Garpon contravened the Anglo-Tibetan Trade Regulation. Thus, the import of wool from Western Tibet to the Indian territory was becoming costlier and, at the same time, the British Government of India was losing its face in Tibet.

Therefore, to sort out the matter with the Western Tibetan officials at Rudok and Gartok, and to negotiate a compromise, the British Government of India deputed Sir Edward Wakefield, an ICS officer, to Western Tibet in CE 1929. He met the Jongpon of Rudok and succeeded in getting the duty reduced from ten to two percent, but his mission to bring the Garpon to term failed and he had to agree (on behalf of the Government of India) to the two percent tax already imposed by the Garpon on the Ladakhi traders.<sup>41</sup> The British trade activities continued at Gartok in the later years also, when Dr. Kanshi Ram, who had earlier accompanied the Wakefield Mission to Western Tibet, was the British Trade Agent.<sup>42</sup>

From this discussion, it may be understood that the role of Kinnaura traders in the inter-border trade between India and Tibet has been very crucial. That trade continued on the traditional lines, without much change despite political manoeuvring by the British Government of India, and it went on the similar lines even after India attained independence in 1947. However, in the wake of hostilities precipitated by the Chinese in October 1962 on the international border involving grazing rights for goats and sheep, the inter-border trade between India and Tibet came to an abrupt halt. It is estimated that at that time there were as many as 150 regular and 250 occasional traders of Kinnaur engaged in the inter-border trade activities.<sup>43</sup>

On 7<sup>th</sup> September 1993, after a gap of 31 years, a trade agreement was signed between the Indian Prime Minister and his Chinese counterpart. It provides for the resumption of inter-border trade between the two countries, mainly on the traditional lines. According to the agreement, India could import wool, goatskins, *pashmina*, yak-hair, goats, sheep, horses, salt, Chinaclay, butter and silk in exchange for the traditional Indian merchandise. In pursuance of that agreement, trade between the two countries was once again resumed on 16<sup>th</sup> July 1994 at Jiuba, the venue of trade-mart in Tibet. On that occasion, 63 Kinnaura traders crossed over to the Tibetan territory from Chuppan in Namgia village of Kinnaur with 27 mule-loads of traditional commodities, besides some new items.<sup>44</sup> Incidentally, no Chinese trader reached the mart on that occasion for 'sudden' collapse of a bridge at Lapshak on the Satluj and blockade of the track.

### MODERN SCENARIO

Until the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century, nothing precisely is known about the politico-administrative setup of Kinnaur, and we find *tthakaras* of Kinnaur ruling the roosts, while owing allegiance to different powerful kingdoms around. It was only under the Bushahri ruler Kehari Singh (CE 1639-1696) that Kinnaur, as an integral part of Bushahr kingdom, emerged significantly in the trans-Himalayan political arena. While, most of the southwestern part of the kingdom was ruled by the various recalcitrant petty fiefdoms

(*tthakuraies*),<sup>45</sup> whose allegiance to Bushahr was restricted only to the payment of tribute, the *tthakaras* in northeastern part of the kingdom in Kinnaur were loyal to their ruler and stood with the Crown whenever the situation warranted, as we learn from their past role. Once again, the Kinnaura troops rose to the occasion, when the venturesome Gurkhas stormed over the kingdom in CE 1810, soon after Raja Ugar Singh (CE 1736-1810) had died, leaving his minor son Mahender Singh as the successor to the throne. Gerard records:

"Most of the other districts, which were formerly ruled by petty chiefs, of whom there are many descendants still alive, would revolt upon the first favourable opportunity; and it was in Koonawur that the Rajah and Ranees found refuge and were supported, during the time the Goorkhalees possessed the other parts of Busehur. The hardy Koonawurees were almost the only soldiers; and by destroying the bridges, and throwing other obstacles in the way of the Goorkha army, they succeeded in giving them so much trouble, that the commander judged it prudent to conclude a treaty with them, in which he promised that no Goorkha would be allowed to enter Koonawur, on condition of their giving 7,500 Rs. annually, which sum was always punctually paid. The Koonawurees often pointed out with exultation the spot where they defeated Umur Sing's advanced guard, which was one of the reasons that induced the commandant to make peace with them."<sup>46</sup>

### Gurkha Invasion

The Gurkhas are known to have indulged in mass scale destruction and devastation as they advanced towards the capital at Rampur. They plundered the ancient Dattatreya temple at Dattnagar on way to Rampur. During one of my explorations, I visited that temple on 5<sup>th</sup> September 1976. The old *pujari* of the temple told me that the temple was pillaged by the Gurkhas. They took away the gold images in the temple. However, when a curse was inflicted on their commander, the images were ordered to be restored, but the servants played a bluff: they returned copper images in place

of the gold ones. Those sheet-pressed copper images are still under worship in that temple. Besides, the architectural fragments of the ancient stone temple, built in the classical style, may be seen littered around and some of the relics kept in the lately built temple.

Fearing the invaders, the people of Rampur fled across the Satluj for their lives. The Gurkhas plundered treasury and destroyed state archives. Gerard happened to stay in the palace at Rampur on 23<sup>rd</sup> September 1821, wherein he found most of the paintings defaced by the invaders.<sup>47</sup> The queen-mother and infant Mahender Singh fled to safety of Kamru Fort. According to Gerard, they took refuge at village Tholang (Chagaon).<sup>48</sup> While fleeing, they are reported to have taken away with them the gold and silver of Shaligram, Sita-Ram and Narsing temples in the town, which they turned into money.<sup>49</sup> Rampur, consisting of about one hundred houses and seven to eight shops, bore a deserted look when Gerard was in the town on 9<sup>th</sup> September 1817. There were no shawls, *patoos* or *chowries* and only few articles of any kind in the shops; possibly it carried on a much better trade before the Gurkha invasion.<sup>50</sup>

There are various opinions; most of them based on the oral traditions, about the advancement of Gurkha invaders into Kinnaur. However, one thing is common to them all: the Gurkhas never entered Kinnaur beyond a bridge that the Kinnaura troops had broken to thwart Gurkha entry into Kinnaur. However, the first-hand recorded account is furnished by Gerard, who was on the scene a couple of years after the Gurkhas had left the kingdom. He says that the Gurkha advance guards had penetrated as far as Jangi, where the Kinnaura troops under Tikam Das intercepted and partially defeated them. After that, the Kinnaura troops destroyed the "Sango at Powaree" (Poari) to prevent the main body of invaders following them.<sup>51</sup> That event probably gave birth to the popular tradition that Fateh Ram, the *wazeer* of Poari, offered sealed wooden boxes filled with stones to the invaders, telling them that those contained the state treasures. Believing the *wazeer*, the invaders carried away the boxes intact and found the hoax played on them only after they had left the country.<sup>52</sup>

The main body of Gurkha troops advanced up to Wangtu<sup>53</sup> (or Choltu, according to the local traditions) wooden bridge. However,

the vigilant Kinnaura troops broke that bridge, restricting the Gurkha advancement further in Kinnaur. The stranded invaders were severely mauled and repulsed by the Kinnaura troops in the gorilla warfare. According to another popular tradition that I found at village Sapni (*Da-pang*), the strategic location of the castle-temple and the palace of Guge Rani at Sapni above Karcham attracted the attention of Gurkha troops. They made an attempt to assail it. However, the resolute Kinnauras repulsed that attack by using an ingenious defence system. They hurled volleys of massive boulders and rocks (locally called *dheeng*) with tremendous force over the enemy positions in the manner of Roman catapult. For that, various groups of sturdy men bent tall and strong deodar trees in the opposite direction by pulling them backwards with the sturdy ropes of *moonj* grass, tied to their tops, where heavy boulders were positioned. In one abrupt action, the ropes were released, hurling the boulders on the target. Fearing the fusillades of heavy missiles coming on them, the Gurkhas ran for their lives in utter chaos, leaving their weapons behind. The arrows that the fleeing troops fired on the defenders were retrieved from the tree-trunks, and those are believed now to be in village Punang near Tapri.

The fighting strength of Bushahr constituted only the ill-equipped but hardy and trustworthy Kinnaura 3,000 troops. A thousand of them had matchlocks and the remaining had only bows of split bamboo and bone-tipped arrows.<sup>54</sup>

The Bushahr kingdom remained under Gurkha occupation for about five years from CE 1810 to 1815. To allow the queen-mother and infant Mahender Singh remain unharmed in the Kamru Fort (or at Tholang), they were obliged to pay rupees 12,000 (Rs. 7,500 according to Gerard) as the annual tribute to the Gurkha tormentors for their safety. Nothing is known about the activities of Gurkhas during their occupation of the kingdom for almost five years. The scholars on this region, relying on the popular traditions, have made out a general impression that they remained idle for all the five years, which obviously could not have been the situation. The Gurkhas in Bushahr or other kingdoms had never come with the intention to occupy territory or to rule, but their sole objective was loot and plunder. Similarly, it is equally unbelievable

that communication between Kinnaur and rest of the kingdom (including the capital town of Rampur) remained disrupted for all that time. In fact a new bridge was built soon after near the damaged one.<sup>55</sup> Having established their headquarters at Sarahan,<sup>56</sup> the Gurkhas continued unabated with their plundering spree, and the people as far as the Tibetan border continued to groan under their tyranny. In this context, the observation of Francke about the monastery at Kanam is significant. He says, "The monastery may have been ransacked several times; for the last time by the Gurkhas. When Gerard was on his expedition in the Satluj valley, he met with continual reports of the devastation by the Gurkhas from Kotgur to the Tibetan frontier."<sup>57</sup> Gerard extensively travelled in Kinnaur from CE 1817 to 1821, just a couple of years after the Gurkhs left the territory. Therefore nothing can be more accurate than his observations on what the Gurkhas did during their stay in Bushahr. From the accounts of Gerard and the material evidence, we do not come across any peacetime activity that may be attributed to them, except the ruined and fallen forts and castles at various places in the Himalayan interiors. The ruling family could buy immunity from the Gurkha tyranny by committing tribute to them, but the helpless people of kingdom were left to fend for themselves against the tyrants. Certainly, the life of common people in those tormenting years must have been extremely miserable, for most of what they produced from their fields might have been appropriated by the Gurkhas for their consumption. How far the Gurkha invasion of Bushahr bore upon the life of common people in Kinnaur may be understood from a folk song – *Gorkha boirees* – that furnishes a vivid account of that event.<sup>58</sup> There is another folk song, sung in Chagaon village that tells that the local devta of that village in the guise of a foot soldier hurled volleys of huge boulders on the enemy troops.

The expulsion of Gurkhas from Bushahr was a great relief to the people. The royal family was freed from the captivity and Mahender Singh, then of about five years of age, was installed as the ruler of Bushahr under a *sanad* granted by the British Government on 6<sup>th</sup> November 1815.<sup>59</sup> Mahender Singh lived until CE 1850, but he proved to be an imbecile and incapable ruler. Therefore, the institution of hereditary *wazeers* (also called *Bisht* or *Negi*) emerged

dominant in Kinnaur area of the kingdom. It was divided into three *wizarats* or the domains of hereditary *wazeers*. Those *wizarats* were the Poari, Kuhal and Shua, but none of these had a definite area jurisdiction. It changed from time to time. The *wazeers* of those *wizarats* had the responsibility of collecting revenue and maintain law and order in the *wizarats* under their charge. Besides those three hereditary institutions of *wazeers*, there also existed an institution of the *sarhadi wazeer*, who was the in-charge of the border of Kinnaur with Spiti and Tibet. The institution of *sarhadi wazeer* was not hereditary, but the ablest man selected from the *pargana* of Shua or Tukpa was appointed to that job. The *sarhadi wazeer* had free hand in maintaining law and order on the border. Possibly, the institution of *sarhadi wazeer* was created under the provision of the Tangmogang Treaty to protect the border after Kehari Singh (CE 1639-1696) regained Kinnaur from the Ladakhis. However, that institution was abolished after the British gained control on the kingdom.

At Rampur, after the death of Raja Mahender Singh in CE 1850, Shamsheer Singh (CE 1850-1914), then a minor of eleven years, succeeded to the throne. Therefore, administration of the state was assigned to Mansukh Das, who functioned as a regent. Later, he was replaced by Sham Lal, a tehsildar of Nurpur, who functioned as the manager under the Agent of Hill States. However, the affairs remained far from being satisfactory. The situation remained the same even after Shamsheer Singh took the reins of state in his hands. He also proved to be as incompetent as his father was. Therefore, he was obliged to relinquish kingship in favour of his son Raghunath Singh in CE 1887.

Thus, from CE 1810 to 1887, the portents had been ominous for the kingdom. Starting with the plunder and tyranny under the Gurkhas, the kingdom had to suffer under its incompetent kings, but for the Kinnauri *wazeers*, who continued to hold the administration together on the traditional pattern. From the innumerable folk traditions, it is evident that the *wizarat* era in Kinnaur was people-friendly. It was for the goodwill of *wazeers* that the Bushahri rulers could muster troops from Kinnaur against Ladakh and the Gurkhas, while none of the feudatories came to their rescue. One of the Poari *wazeers*, Ran Bahadur Singh, was so influential and



popular among the people that a person carrying his letter was certainly to be treated with courtesy wherever he went in Kinnaur. He is even known to have stood with the people of Dodra-Kwar area for protecting their rights against the raja. Although Ran Bahadur Singh has not been presented in good light for he rebelled against the ruler, Shamsheer Singh, and the British authority in the interest of people of Dodra Kwar, yet Alan Mitchell, Manager of Bushahr State dubbed him as usurper for the obvious reason.<sup>60</sup>

Another instance of popularity of the institution of *wizarat* may be evidenced from the *dum* – the typical passive resistance movement of the people in Kinnaur and other neighbouring hill area. In about CE 1854, Sham Lal, the Manager of State, imposed cash assessment of revenue, but the people resented monetary payment. Besides, a simmering discontentment pervaded among the people against the policies of the Manager of State. For instance, the revenue was levied disproportionately and arbitrarily to meet the burgeoning expenses of the royal household, and besides the stipulated revenue, the people were obliged to shell out much more to satisfy host of revenue officials deputed for collection.<sup>61</sup>

That grouse of the non-Kinnaura subjects of the kingdom may be reasonable, for the rulers of Bushahr had always been softer towards the people of Kinnaur in revenue collection. Since, the arable land in Kinnaur was too meagre to support the population, land-based assessment of revenue that Sham Lal imposed on Kinnaur (then organised as Chini tehsil) under the summary settlement in CE 1851 was repealed on the pressure from the *wazeers*, but only an ad hoc monetary collection, ranging from eight to twelve rupees per family was done. The people of Kinnaur could well afford that monetary payment, for the trade-based economy of the majority of people of Kinnaur had made them money-wise quite rich. However, the agriculturist non-Kinnaura subjects had no cash, but grains and other forest and farm-based produce to defray revenue. Therefore, more than the people of Kinnaur, the non-Kinnaura subjects of the kingdom felt much aggrieved on the cash assessment of revenue.

The people, though restive, maintained their calm until one Paras Ram Vakil was nominated as the Superintendent of State against the customary practice that entitled the hereditary *wazeer*

for that post. That decision hurt the people of Kinnaur directly, for they respected the institution of hereditary *wazeer* and were averse to any change in the traditional system.

The imposition of cash assessment of revenue that aggrieved the agriculturists, coupled with the appointment of Superintendent of State, disregarding the hereditary institution of *wazeers* which annoyed the Kinnauras, and provided enough ground for the Kinnaura and non-Kinnaura subjects of the kingdom to join hands against the king. The people opposed those decisions in a non-violent manner, and around CE 1859 resorted to the passive resistance, which in popular parlance was known as the *dum*. They abandoned their fields, left them uncultivated. No crop meant no revenue to the state. It was only after the interference of G. Barnes, the Superintendent of Simla Hill States, that the traditional system was restored to the satisfaction of popular demand. However, he maintained that though Sham Lal's assessment was one of the main causes of popular resentment, yet "at a more opportune time the experiment should be renewed." Once again, the popularity of traditional *wizarat* institution was vindicated, and even the settlement of CE 1874 was carried out under the supervision of the *wazeers* themselves. That *Bandobast Wazeeran* retained the cess in kind. That remained in force until the first regular settlement of Kinnaur area (Chini tehsil) was carried out by Mian Durga Singh under the supervision of Tika Raghunath Singh in CE 1890-1891.

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# 4

## ADMINISTRATIVE SETUP AND ECONOMIC SCENARIO

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### CHINI-KALPA-RECKONG PEO – THE ADMINISTRATIVE HUB

The Chini-Kalpa-Reckong Peo area is the heartland of Kinnaur district. All along the history, it has been the nerve centre of Kinnaur. While Kalpa and Reckong Peo are the new localities, the offshoots of Chiney (or Chini), itself had been the traditional headquarters of Kinnaur through ages. It had been the tehsil headquarters of Chini tehsil that covered entire Kinnaur beyond Wangtu since CE 1891, when Tika Raghunath Singh of Bushahr made it a tehsil. Chini continued to be the tehsil headquarters of Chini tehsil of Mahasu district even after independence, when that district was formed after the devolution of Shimla Hill States into the Indian Union and formation of Himachal Pradesh. That position continued until 1<sup>st</sup> May 1960, when Kinnaur was made an independent district with headquarters at Chini.

How old village Chini is, may be anybody's guess. However, it is certain that this should have been a flourishing village during the period of Rinchen Sangpo (CE 958-1055). The Great Lotsab is known to have built a temple at *Hu-bu-lan-ka*, i.e., *Hobulangka*, which Giuseppe Tucci and Joseph Gergan have identified with the present-day Chini. Even today, the Kinnaur region between Pangi and Chini is known as *Ho-bo* or *Ho-bo-lang*. That temple, not monastery, existed on a local feature above the village until that was destroyed by fire in CE 1959.



Chini village.

Chini might have been a place of political authority, as may be inferred from its traditional full name as *Gyel-sa Chiney*, i.e., Chiney – the Royal Place or the Capital. The people of upper Kinnaur still know this place by that identity. It may suggest that in olden times, upper Kinnaur was ruled and administered from *Gyel-sa Chiney*. Popular tradition holds that a three-storeyed mud-roofed *gorang*, i.e., a castle, built by the powerful *tthakur* (local ruler) of Chiney (Chini), existed on the dominating feature in the village. That *gorang* was also destroyed by fire in December 1959. Now a newly-built school building stands on that site. Nevertheless, the locals occasionally visit this site to pay homage to the tradition.

Chini village is very important, for at this place, three distinct cultural currents may be found mingling together to give a quintessential cosmopolitan character to it. The Himalayan Buddhism from Western Tibet (*Ngari-Korsum*) and the Brahmanical traditions from the Indian mainland blended here with the native belief systems to give rise to a quintessential religio-cultural milieu. We shall talk in detail about these influences later. Here, let us concentrate on the foreign element – the Moravian missionaries. They also became active in Kinnaur area to introduce Christianity during the second half of 19<sup>th</sup> century. They could hardly register any long-lasting impact. Most of the converts were the backsliders of

the lower castes, who entered the congregation for material benefits.<sup>1</sup> According to Revered K. Fichtner:

“There are two Moravian stations in Bushahr. The first is at Pui (Poo), a village on the upper Sutlej, some 15 miles (24 kilometres) from the Chinese-Tibetan frontier, which was selected as a station by the Revd. E. Pagell who desired to work and wait patiently among the people at Pui (Poo) and the neighbouring villages where Tibetan is understood. When he died in 1883 the Christian community only consisted of a few converts, but the fruits of his unobtrusive labours appeared after his death, and on Easter Sunday 1897, the Revd. T.D.L. Schreve, his successor, baptised 25 Tibetans, the congregation now numbers about 50.

From Pui (Poo) the Moravian missionaries have often crossed the border of Tibet and penetrated into the forbidden land as far as Shipki where the villager received them kindly, but did not allow them to proceed further as they have strict orders from the authorities at Lhasa to repel any foreigner who ventures to travel beyond their villages. Some years ago Mr. Schreve introduced a handloom from Europe and taught the people to make blankets. The Mission also employs 20 to 30 women on spinning.

The second station is at Chini also on the Sutlej, about 60 miles (96 kilometres) below Pui (Poo). The Mission compound is just above the Hindustan-Tibet road. The people of Chini profess Hinduism and speak a dialect called Kanawari, but as Buddhism and Hinduism meet here they have adopted many Buddhist customs. About 1850 the Church Missionary Society hoped to establish a station at Chini but soon abandoned the idea. In May 1900, the Revered J.T. and Mrs. Bruske arrived, and Mr. Bruske at once began work by erecting two small houses which were finished before the winter set in. In December 1900, a school was started which was pretty regularly attended by 12 boys, all very eager to learn. All Mrs. Bruske's efforts to win over the girls and women proved vain. 'It is not our custom for girls to learn reading and writing,' they say. Even sewing and knitting are regarded as privileges of



men alone. Regularly every Sunday the Gospel is preached and every weekday a short meeting is held for the boys and workmen employed by the Mission."<sup>2</sup>

The school at Chini is known to have continued until CE 1912. Interestingly, Rahul Sankrityayan sojourned and wrote a part of *Kinnar Desh Main* in the bungalow that Bruske had built to live at Chini. He has written sympathetically and vividly about the work that Bruske did.<sup>3</sup>

The identity of this locality as Kalpa is not very old: we come across this term only in the post-independence period, after the Chini tehsil of Mahasu district (now named as Shimla district) was made into a separate district as Kinnaur district on 1<sup>st</sup> May 1960. It was the name given to a part of Chini village, where the original district headquarters was established and developed into a small township. Possibly, the word 'Chini' being phonetically similar to China, which started claiming chunks of Indian territory on the Indo-Chinese border as its own, might have been the reason for changing the name of district headquarters from Chini to Kalpa. Being located at a higher elevation at 2,960 metres from the MSL,



A school building and a new temple stands where once Rinchen Sangpo temple stood at Hobulangka.

Kalpa remained snow-bound and cold for most part of the year. Therefore, a new township was developed at the adjoining lower level, some 13 kilometres away from Kalpa at an elevation of 2,290 metres from the MSL. Thus, the new township of Reckong Peo came into being as the district headquarters of Kinnaur. This township is gradually emerging into a regular town with the construction of different district-level offices, educational and medical institutions, residential quarters, houses and commercial lines. This place is 232 kilometres from Shimla, the capital headquarters of Himachal Pradesh. Obviously, 'Kalpa' and 'Reckong Peo' are the identities of recent past and so is the name 'Chini' of the village, though this village has a hoary and eventful past. The traditional name of this village has been *Chiney* and the local people still call this village by its traditional identity, but the *kocha* – the outsiders (called *dakkar* in Meghalaya) – conveniently distorted that to Chini, and now it has come to stay.

Most of Kinnaur was largely a terra incognita, relegated to secluded splendour until mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, when Lord Dalhousie, the then Governor-General of India decided sojourning at Chini. During his governor-generalcy in India, Lord Dalhousie could not



Road workers in Kinnaur.

keep good health and even the summer climate of Shimla did not suit him. Therefore, he decided to spend the rainy season of CE 1850 at Chini. Going to Chini was not an easier task for the Governor-General: it took him fourteen days from Shimla to reach there. He records:

“....the trek, for it could hardly be called a path, was desperate and for women terrific. It is simply the native track neither engineered or formed. Flights of stairs formed of loose stones are the chief ascents and sometimes stairs of trunks of trees. In rounding the corners of precipices I have seen the track not three feet wide, and the Sutlej 3,000 feet or so sheer below you.”<sup>4</sup>

This scenic place, set amidst the tall deodar trees with the snow-clad sacred *Raldang* peak (Kinnar Kailash) forming an idyllic backdrop fascinated him as *“a province near the snow, where the rains do not come, and where the climate is described as better than anything since Eden.”*

He lived from June to September in a lodge, specially built for him at this place, but was at pains while leaving it, as he wrote some days before leaving it: *“the time is at hand when I must leave this charming valley and I groan over it. I have had neither ache nor pain to speak of since I left Simla.”* That bungalow was later used for travellers but was plundered in 1858. It is extinct now.

Reckong Peo, the new headquarters of Kinnaur district is an upcoming and developing town with all civic facilities – college, hospital, rest-houses, etc. Although, the individual government buildings are reasonably well-designed, yet the planning of a township leaves much to be desired. For want of proper regulatory authority, haphazard growth of houses and shops is rampant almost everywhere. Thanks to the climate of Kinnaur, the choked and overflowing drains do not stink; otherwise the situation could have been horrible. The Kinnauras have traditionally been good traders, but running a shop has never been their cup of tea. As a result, one may find most of the business at Reckong Peo being controlled by the non-Kinnauras. In fact, this phenomenon holds good to all the ethnic communities in the interiors of the Western Himalayan region, where most of the retail business is monopolised by the immigrants. Rampur, the capital town of the erst-

while Bushahr state, is a glaring example to the point. Majority of the population of that town was made up of the people immigrated from Ambala, Hoshiarpur, Patiala and Kangra.<sup>5</sup>

### DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

Kinnaur district is spread over a geographical area of 6,401 square kilometres.<sup>6</sup> Against this, the total geographical area of Himachal Pradesh is 55,673 square kilometres. Thus, Kinnaur district constitutes only 11.50% of the total geographical area of the state. According to the Census of India 2001, this district is inhabited by 78,334 persons, of which 42,173 (53.84%) are males and 36,161 (46.16%) are the females.<sup>7</sup> Of the total population of 60,77,900 persons in Himachal Pradesh, the total population of this district constitute 1.29% only.

This may follow that while Kinnaur occupies 11.50% of the total geographical area of the state, it only supports 1.29% of the state's total population. That makes it as one of the most thinly populated districts of Himachal Pradesh, with the density of population at 12 persons per square kilometre against the state average of 109 persons per square kilometre.

However, these cold inferences may be deceptive to evaluate the Man and Nature relationship and the pressure on the natural resources to sustain population. The population in Kinnaur is not evenly distributed all over, but concentrated on some of such places that can be developed for settlement. Most of the geographical area of Kinnaur is covered with perpetual snow ranges, inaccessible and uninhabitable mountain stretches, highland pastures and the rugged trans-Himalayan cold desert, wherein the human interference is minimal. Thus, the habitational areas on the gentler slopes, undulating stretches, meadows and mountain spurs are few and widely separated. Therefore, it may be appropriate to move away from this 'population & geographical area equation' to a more tangible and rational quotient by taking into account the actual natural resource-base and the related beneficiary population. Chib suggests a term "settled area density of population,"<sup>8</sup> which takes into account the resource-base or the usable land area and the user population. However, it may be reasonable to express

it in terms of the 'usable area density of population', for the 'resource-base' or the 'usable area' may extend beyond the 'settled area' to the peripheral pastoral patches and forests for the biomass needs also. The total 'usable area', i.e., the revenue area covered by the inhabited villages of Kinnaur district is 59,619 hectares<sup>9</sup> or 596 square kilometres against the geographical area of 6,401 square kilometres. Thus, the usable land area constitutes only 9.31% of the geographical area. The density of population computed on the usable area comes to 131 persons per square kilometre against 109 of the state. Even this indicator may also not be realistic, for human activity and land use (or abuse) under various projects – road construction, power generation projects and army installations – have extended far beyond the limits of 'usable area'. Kinnaur is today not only populated by the local inhabitants, but a considerable number of *kocha*, i.e., the outsiders, are also living here in the villages, project colonies and the army quarters. In fact, out of the total population of 78,334 persons in the district, only 56,268 fall in the category of 'scheduled tribe', constituting only 71.83% of the total population. The remaining 22,066 persons, forming 28.17% are the non-Kinnauras. Among those, the government officials, military and paramilitary personals, project officials and the imported labourers from Bihar and Nepal form a major bulk. If one considers, and perhaps nobody considers, the native-*kocha* conglomerate, the demographic pattern shall present a completely different and gloomy picture under the far poorer ecosystem in this steep and fragile terrain.

Kinnaur is essentially a rural district, having 660 revenue villages, of which only 234 are inhabited and the remaining 426 are uninhabited.<sup>10</sup> A revenue village comprises a group of hamlets. The Census Department adopts revenue village as a unit for enumeration and data compilation purpose. There is no urban centre in this district. This district is administratively divided into five tehsils and one sub-tehsil as follows:

1. Poo tehsil has its headquarters at Poo. This tehsil, extends over 1,021.70 square kilometres of geographical area, has a total population of 7,898 persons occupying 1,815 households. It has 27 inhabited and 53 uninhabited villages.
2. Moorang tehsil has its headquarters at Moorang. This tehsil

is spread in a geographical area of 1628.60 square kilometres, and has total population of 10,383 persons living in 2,332 households. It has 38 inhabited villages and 103 uninhabited villages.

3. Kalpa tehsil has its headquarters at Kalpa. This tehsil, extended over 390.90 square kilometres of geographical area, has a total population of 17,630 persons residing in 1,815 households. It has 38 inhabited and 46 uninhabited villages.
4. Sangla tehsil has its headquarters at Sangla. This tehsil, spread in a geographical area of 1,282.20 square kilometres, has total population of 11,731 persons living in 2,591 households. It has 28 inhabited villages and 82 uninhabited villages.
5. Nichar tehsil has its headquarters at Nichar. This tehsil, extended over 1,182.60 square kilometres of geographical area, has a total population of 26,630 persons residing in 6,541 households. It has 88 inhabited and 100 uninhabited villages.
6. Hangrang sub-tehsil has its headquarters at Yangthang. This sub-tehsil, spread in a geographical area of 72.40 square kilometres, has total population of 4,062 persons living in 1,031 households. It has 15 inhabited villages and 42 uninhabited villages.

The tehsil-wise distribution of population and the number of inhabited villages reveal that Nichar tehsil, being the outermost tehsil of Kinnaur, is the most populated one with 26,630 persons living in as many as 88 villages. The population gets gradually thinner and the number of inhabited villages lesser upstream of Satluj, reaching at its lowest at 4,062 persons living in 15 villages in Hangrang sub-tehsil, located in the northeastern corner of the district.

The sex ratio of this district is also not very encouraging. There are only 857 females after 1,000 males against state indicator of 968 females after 1,000 males. The overall literacy rate in the district is 75.20%. Among the males, it is 84.30%, and among the females, it is 64.40%. Against this, overall literacy rate of the state is 76.50%; among the males, it is 85.03% and among the females, it is 67.40%.<sup>11</sup> Thus, the male-female sex ratio and the literacy rate

of the district compare lesser than the state level indicators of Himachal Pradesh. However, the literacy rate of Kinnaur is better than that of Kullu (72.90%), Lahul & Spiti (73.10%) and Sirmaur (70.40%).

The traditional inhabitants of Kinnaur are generally called Kinnaura. They have been defined as the 'scheduled tribe' under Article 342 of the Constitution of India. Unfortunately, in most of works on Kinnaur, the traditional inhabitants of Kinnaur are defined as 'tribal', which they certainly are not by any stretch of definition. The people of Kinnaur are not only one of the most progressive, well-informed, well-educated and highly-placed people in the country, but also they are the people, who have highest regard for their hoary past, colourful traditions and vibrant culture. Otherwise also, this prefix 'tribal' may not be in good taste in this age of social resurgence and egalitarianism. The International Charter of the United Nations addresses the tribal people as the indigenous people. Although India is a signatory to that charter, yet that term is still being used flagrantly in all government notifications and records and used by most of the scholars.

#### ECONOMIC SCENARIO

The mainstay of traditional economy of the inhabitants of Kinnaur has been pastoralism, trade and agriculture. While the pastoralism and trade have been the primary economic activities, agriculture has been regarded as the secondary and supplementary activity along with rudimentary fruit cultivation for culinary purpose and preparing beverages until the mid-50s of 20<sup>th</sup> century. Nevertheless, the people of Kinnaur have never been poor or wanting. In fact these terms have been alien to the traditional social psyche of the people of Kinnaur. They have by nature been very contented and self-dependant people despite all natural odds. Speaking about the means of livelihood in Kinnaur, Alexander Gerard notes:

"Notwithstanding the want of grain, there are no marks of poverty in the country, and the inhabitants are generally so rich, that when two of them belonging to the village of Leedung wished for an advance of 1,000 rupees to purchase wool for the British Government,

the Wuzeer in charge of that place, said, he would go security for 10,000 rupees each person. This is by no means a singular instance; for although none of them have large fortunes like the merchants and bankers of the plains, yet the riches are much more equally divided, and the poorest people are never in want, for if even grain be scarce, as it often is, yet their large flocks furnish an inexhaustible store."<sup>12</sup>

The Indian classical traditions are silent about their economy. It may well be conjectured that originally the legendary inhabitants of Kinnaur, both the *Kinnars* and *Bhots*, too must have been the pastoral people under the obtaining hostile geo-climatic condition of the rugged Himalayan environment, largely subsisting on rearing large ovine, caprine and bovine stocks for food and clothing. Besides, goats served as the beasts of burden for carrying goods across trackless mountain passes and to the down country. They continued with that occupation until the pre-modern times, moving to the distant pasturing grounds in the far trans-Himalayan steppes in summer and to the outer Himalayan grasslands for wintering, synchronizing their migration with the annual bioclimatic calendar. Of late, wintering of these flocks in the outer Himalayan area is being gradually discouraged, for these animals, especially the goats, not only eat away the tender shoots of young plants, but also engenders soil erosion. However, with certain modifications in the age-old routine, the nomadism got replaced with the transhumance and settled living. In that process, not only could the Kinnauras establish rapport with the people of different places, but also could barter commodities of one place with that of the other. That exchange paved way for a regular trading activity, which, in the course of time, became one of the major anchors of their economy along with transhumance.

Interesting aspect of that routine is that in upper Kinnaur, where the Kirat element predominates, rearing livestock – mainly goats and sheep – and trade have been the primary occupation of the people. For, there has been nothing else substantial enough through agriculture that could sustain living in that trans-Himalayan arid and alpine environment.



### Rearing Livestock

So far rearing of livestock – mainly goats and sheep – is concerned, Kinnaur ranks one of the highest in the state. It is still one of the most important occupations and the mainstay of the economy in the upper Kinnaur. These animals not only provide the valuable wool and *pasham* for clothing, but also mutton and milk for food; skin for various household purposes; and manure for farming. A local variety of goat, known as *chikku*, is reputed to produce finest type of *pasham*. In fact, the traditional yardstick to assess wealth of a family in Kinnaur has been the number of sheep and goats that a family possesses.

Besides the goats, sheep and *chikkus*, the strong and hardy yak is the most important cattle of Kinnaur, where, under the cold climatic condition, even mountain-cow cannot survive. The male yak is also known as *yag* and the female yak as *breeme*. The *breeme* provides very nourishing milk. In upper Kinnaur and the adjoining Spiti, yak also provide meat, which, besides being consumed fresh, is also dried and stored for the winter months. That dried meat is known as *shakpo*. The yak and cow are cross-bred to produce *churu* or *zo* and the female *zomo*. While the people of Kinnaur are, perhaps with a rare exception, the meat-eaters, eating fowls and fish has customarily been a taboo.

How indispensable and important the occupation of rearing livestock has been in Kinnaur may be known from the decadal changes reflected on the number of livestock between the years 1982 and 1992, based on the figures of livestock census of the Directorate of Land Records, Himachal Pradesh, as given in Table 1.

These figures present a very interesting picture on the changing occupational and economic patterns of the people of Kinnaur. The marginal decrease registered during the period under study in number of bovine, possibly including the trans-Himalayan species of yak and *churu*, may indicate rearing of cattle is gradually on the decline possibly due to the reason that horticulture is gaining precedence over agriculture and rearing of cows and buffaloes for milk is not a viable occupation in the cold climatic condition of Kinnaur. However, there has been sharp increase in the population of goats and sheep, affirming the fact that shepherding continues

to be the cornerstone of economy of Kinnaur. On the other hand, the insignificant increase in the equine (and others) number clearly indicates the fact that the legendary trans-Himalayan *goonths* have become irrelevant for transportation of commodities, because heavy trucks on the National Highway have taken their place, and these are only useful in the remoter parts where vehicular transport is not available, or for local transportation. People of Kinnaur prefer mutton for poultry. The increase in the number of poultry birds only indicates consumption of chicken largely by the outsiders.

**Table 1. Decadal change in livestock and poultry between 1982 and 1992**

<i>Livestock &amp; Poultry</i>	1982 <sup>13</sup>	1992 <sup>14</sup>	% difference
Cows	22,352	20,935	-6.34
Buffalo	5	3	-40
<b>Total Bovine</b>	<b>22,357</b>	<b>20,938</b>	<b>-6.34</b>
Sheep	47,168	57,723	+22.40
Goats	20,148	28,568	+41.80
<b>Total Ovine &amp; Caprine</b>	<b>67,316</b>	<b>86,291</b>	<b>+28.19</b>
Canine	2,151	2,184	+0.06
Equine & others	4,196	5,679	+0.38
<b>Gross Total of Livestock</b>	<b>96,020</b>	<b>1,15,092</b>	<b>+19.86</b>
<b>Poultry</b>	<b>5,233</b>	<b>5,795</b>	<b>+10.74</b>

It may be interesting to find the number of livestock against per hundred persons during the Census benchmark years 1981 and 1991, extended to 1982 and 1992. The total human population of Kinnaur in 1981 was 59,547 persons and in 1991, it was 71,270 persons. Now on computing these figures with the number of livestock in 1982 and 1992, the result is as given in Table 2.

That comparison reveals very interesting trend, which fully corroborates the aforementioned conclusion. There has been only negligible decrease of 0.62% in the number of livestock per hundred persons, meaning thereby that the overall number of livestock per hundred persons has remained almost the same during the decade

under review. However, the number of bovines has decreased appreciably by 23.68%. That may indicate negative trend in the rearing of cattle among the people possibly due to being non-profitable under the obtaining socio-economic environment. On the other hand, the number of sheep and goats has increased from 113 to 121 per hundred persons, registering an increase of 7.10%. That may affirm the aforementioned conclusion that shepherding continues to be a primary economic activity among the Kinnauras. The number of canine, equine and other animals per hundred persons has almost remained static during the decade.

Table 2

Livestock	Total population in 1982 59,547 persons		Total population in 1992 71,270 persons		% of variation
	Total	No. per 100 persons	Total	No. per 100 persons	
Bovine	22,357	38	20,938	29	-23.68
Ovine & Caprine	67,316	113	86,291	121	+7.10
Canine	2,151	4	2,184	3	-25.00
Equine & others	4,196	7	5,679	8	+14.29
Total of Livestock	96,020	162	1,15,092	161	-0.62

## Trade

The racio-cultural affinity of the people of Kinnaur, especially of the inhabitants of upper Kinnaur with their counterparts in Tibet had been a very strong factor to hone their inter-border trading skill. They have been the avid traders: bartering Tibetan products for the Indian ones, and thus saving something to sustain themselves by taking home rice, wheat, barley and other articles of food. For carrying loads of merchandise, they had good pack animals, the *goontths* (trans-Himalayan ponies) besides goats. The way Kinnaura traders decorate their *goontths* with cowries, beads, bells, coloured threads and colourful saddles, etc. subtly indicates their

fondness for them. In fact, the traders of upper Kinnaur had customary privilege for trading with their Tibetan counterparts. The traders of Tukpa, Shua and Shalkar *parganas* in upper Kinnaur used to go to Tibet in groups, duly escorted against the highway robbers, and transact business with their own traditionally defined Tibetan counterparts at Gartok. Each of those trade-groups had a defined place in Tibet, where it could conduct its trade. Accordingly, the group from Tukpa confined itself to the Tibetan villages of Gyanam, Kangsang, Gianma, Murbhang, Dubgya and Marbuk. The Shua group was allotted Chhang, Rodu, Sangmang, Ladakh, Machang Gianma and Mongpa. The traders of Shalkar were earmarked the area of Cho-Chalang and Chang-Gialang, but they were free to trade with any one whom they wished, because, as the tradition has it, Shalkar formed a part of Gartok district, which once belonged to Bushahr kingdom.

That was the way how two Kirat traders dealt with each other, but when the transaction was between the Kirat (Tibetan) and non-Kirat traders, the rules were different. A good example of that is known from Barahat (present-day Uttarkashi) in Uttarakhand. To make sure that each Tibetan trader (or a group of Tibetan traders) transacted business with only his traditional counterpart at the trade-mart of Barahat, a round stone from the Bhagirathi was broken into two halves. The Tibetan trader retained one half and his Indian counterpart retained the other. Whenever the two parties met for business, the halves were reassembled to ensure that they fitted exactly to ascertain the identity of the traditional and genuine trading partners. Thus, different trading families had established age-old trading bonds on both sides of the Great Divide.<sup>15</sup>

The Kinnaura traders used to import wood, fleece, salt, borax, carpets, *numdas* and *charas* from Tibet. How organised that trade was, may be known from the fact that there existed a high-powered 'Traders Guild' constituted of the Kinnaura and Tibetan traders at Gartok since ancient times. That 'Traders Guild' used to fix trading rates and settle all related disputes. It had the power even to adjudicate matters of 'life and death'.<sup>16</sup> That practice continued almost unchanged on the traditional lines despite political manoeuvring by the British Government of India, and it continued on the similar lines even after India attained independence in 1947.

However, after Indo-China border conflict in October 1962 on the issue of grazing rights, the inter-border trade between India and Tibet came to an abrupt halt.

However, that impasse was broken after a gap of 31 years on 7th September 1993, when an agreement was signed between the Indian Prime Minister and his Chinese counterpart. That agreement provided for the revival of inter-border trade between the two countries on the traditional lines. According to that agreement, India could import *pashmina*, wool, goats, sheep, horses, salt, butter, Chinaclay, silk, goatskins, yak-hair, etc. in exchange for the traditional Indian merchandise. In pursuance of that agreement, trade between the two countries was once again resumed on 16th July 1994 at Jiuba, the venue of trade-mart in Tibet. On that occasion, 63 traders from Chuppan in Namgia village of upper Kinnaur crossed over to the Tibetan territory with 27 mule-loads of traditional commodities of trade and some new items. However, none from Tibet reached, reportedly because of the 'sudden' collapse of a bridge at Lapshak on the Satluj and blockade of the track.<sup>17</sup> However, it may be hoped that the inter-border trade activities shall pick up once again at Jiuba in Tibet and Chuppan in upper Kinnaur. This time, it may not only be on the traditional barter system, but also fully convertible currency system. For that, the Indian side is known to have already made infrastructure preparations.

In lower Kinnaur, where the Khash element is predominating, subsistence farming has been the backbone of traditional frugal economy. Besides, rearing livestock has been a very important supplementary source of income. As a general rule, the Khash have never been good traders. In fact, it has never been the Khash forte, not only in Kinnaur, but elsewhere in the Himalayan region as well. The weather in lower Kinnaur remains nearly dry-temperate for most part of the year, except for the few winter months. Therefore, the landscape here is greener, with the evergreen coniferous jungles. The land, though steeply terraced, is manageable for the dryland farming.

Besides the aforementioned principal sources of livelihood, the people of this area have been pursuing various other supplementary activities. Among those, domestic and village handicrafts

and collection of forest products are the important ones. That establishes the fact that there has never been a single primary source of livelihood for the people of Kinnaur. They have been exploring all possible means of economic sustainability, and this has been the economic scenario of Kinnaur through ages until the mid-50s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Even during the post-independence decades, the means of economy have remained essentially the same. However, new dimensions have been added to the existing economic activities. For instance, in place of the traditional crops, people are cultivating cash crops and vegetables. Thus, new vistas of agribusiness have opened up for the people. The horticulture boom has also ushered in prosperity among the people. These changes in the cropping pattern have also reflected upon the food habits of the people: now, rice and wheat have also become essential part of the food along with barley and other traditional lesser (or coarse) grains. However, the age-old trans-border trade has received serious setback. Despite the trade agreement between India and China, the inter-border trade has not been able to take off. Thus, the traditional Kinnaura traders and their favourite pack animals (*goonaths*) are now almost the things of past, rarely to be found on the motorable roads. For, the entire trading activity is now monopolised by the non-Kinnaura wholesalers and retailers. They carry truckloads of commodities from the *mandis* in the plains to the farthest corners of Kinnaur and beyond on the network of vehicular roads.

Undeniably, there has been phenomenal economic development in the socio-economic sphere in Kinnaur under various development plans. Network of roads has made even the remotest village accessible by vehicles. According to the latest available figures, the length of roads in the district totals to 997 kilometres. These include 558 kilometres of metalled motorable roads, 359 kilometres of the unmetalled motorable roads and 80 kilometres of jeepable roads. Telephone, mobile and internet are now the household words in Kinnaur. Thus, the economic prosperity, 'scheduled tribe' status, and communication facility have opened up infinite vistas of education and advancement to the Kinnaura youths. They are able to get highest education in any field anywhere on the globe. Thus, Kinnaur may claim the coveted distinction of being the

district which has highest percentage of persons in the all India services, medical, engineering and other specialised professions. Therefore, it is with good reason that the first chief secretary of Himachal Pradesh was a Kinnaura, Thakur Sen Negi, but he was not alone to get that distinction. B.C. Negi followed him to be the highest bureaucrat in Himachal Pradesh Government. Similarly, L.S. Negi remained a Vice Chancellor and G.C. Negi rose to be the Director of Animal Husbandry and S.P. Negi the Engineer-in-Chief in Himachal Pradesh Government. These are but a few outstanding names among hundreds of the distinguished Kinnauras.

### Agriculture

Agriculture has never been a wholesome occupation of the people in Kinnaur. For it, the local geo-agro-climatic conditions are mainly responsible. On the other hand, people have to work extremely hard in adverse conditions even to reap poor harvest from the unyielding fields. The arable land area of the steep and narrow terraced fields on the slopes and brows of the rugged mountains is minuscule: just 1.50%, i.e., 9,407 hectares of the total geographical area of 6,23,742 hectares. Rest of it is shared by the forest (36,609 hectares, 5.87%), barren and uncultivable land (2,55,681 hectares, 40.99%), land under non-agricultural use (3,21,918 hectares, 51.61%) and cultivable waste land (1,728 hectares, 0.27%).<sup>18</sup> The soil, comprising sand, clay, stones and gravels, is not only unproductive, but unyielding also. The people have to sweat very hard even to get a single crop of lesser foodgrain in a year in upper Kinnaur, where the crop season lasts only for six months in a year due to intensive cold and snow. However, in the lower area where the climate remains tolerably temperate, people manage to get two crops.

Thus, Kinnaur has always been deficit in foodgrains. To supplement that deficiency, the people earlier used to consume varieties of wild vegetables, tubers and herbal roots, mutton and dry fruits – *chuli* (*Prunus armeniaca*), *akhrot* (walnut), wild apricots, apple, *bemi* (*Prunus persica*), *palu* (*Pyrus malus*, sour apple), *chilgoza* (*Pinus gerardiana*), etc. Those traditional fares are now rarely to be seen. Now, the foodgrains are always imported from other parts of the

country and supplied to the people on the subsidised rates. That 'subsidization' has inflicted serious harm on the social psyche, socio-cultural ethos and traditional self-dependent economic structure of Kinnaur. Now the local people do not eat what they grow: they export that in bulk to get higher return and depend on the 'subsidised' supplies for their consumption. According to the government statistics, Kinnaur has been exporting on an average 77.33% of its potato production and 89% of its apple production,<sup>19</sup> leaving only a small fraction for their domestic consumption. Although, figures for the export of other produces are not available, yet from the field inquiries, it has been revealed that almost 95 to 98% of *chilgoza* (*Pinus gerardiana*) is sent out of Kinnaur. But then, it is not Kinnaurites who make a fast buck in that deal: of course, they also do, but most of the profit is appropriated by the *lalas* – the immigrant businessmen, who virtually monopolise the entire business in Kinnaur.

No doubt, that change in food habit, from the nutritious organic foods to the imported foodgrains, may have telling effect on the health of people. Further, the 'subsidization' has instilled indolence among the locals and made them lethargic and easy-going. The fallouts are glaringly apparent: the migrant Gurkhas and Biharis work in the fields, orchards and projects, while the others doze and drink. Drinking has been a normal way of life in Kinnaur and rest of the trans-Himalayan region since ages.

How then the oft-repeated statement in most of the recent works on Kinnaur that 'the agriculture is the largest source of livelihood of the people' is justified, may be anybody's guess. Kinnaur is certainly not an agricultural district. Nevertheless, people have been labouring extremely hard to produce coarse varieties of foodgrains mainly by dry farming to meet their food requirement. The main crop is barley, followed by pulses and maize. These combined together cover only 33.63% of the total cropped area. People also grow a little quantity of wheat, rice, oil seeds, etc. in the lower areas, where the soil is suitable for cultivating these crops and irrigation facility is available, but such areas are quite few: only 4.31% of the total cropped area.<sup>20</sup> In the remaining area, potato and varieties of lesser foodgrain crops are cultivated.

Where there are two cropping seasons – *rabbi* and *kharif*, people



mainly grow barley during the *rabbi* season, as it the major food crop of the area. In the outer (lower) part of the district, some people also grow wheat in the rain-fed areas during the *rabbi* season. People also grow peas during that cropping season.

The *kharif* crops mainly include maize, *koda* (*Eleusine coracana*), *cheena* (*Panicum miliaceum*), *kangini* (*Pennisetum italicum*), *bathu* (*Amaranthus*), *kulth* (*Dulichos uniflorus* or *Dolichos biflorus*), *ogla* (*Fagopyrum esculentum*), *phafra* (*Fagopyrum esculentum*), potato, etc. The people here have also been growing a few wild varieties of fruits, such as *chuli* (*Prunus armeniaca*), *bemi* (*Prunus persica*), walnuts (*Juglans regia*), etc. on the fringes of their terraced fields. Among these, *chuli* is the most important fruit. People use it as one of the staple food items. For instance, cooking oil is extracted from the kernels of *chuli* and its outer pulpy skin is dried and stored for preparing a nourishing drink, called *chul-phanting*. The *bemi* (*Prunus persica*) is eaten fresh, but it is mostly used as dry fruit.

### Household Economic Activities

Nature has not been kind to the people of Kinnaur. The harsh geoclimatic condition and its secluded location in the hinterland have made them resourceful and self-dependant within their limited means. They have found ways to make best use of the raw material available to them. Best quality of fleece and wool have been always available plentifully from their flocks, and they have put that raw material to the best advantage. During the harsh winters, when people remain most of the time indoors, they devote their time to spinning the fleece and wool and weaving wonderful woollen shawls, *pattus*, *patties* (tweed cloth), mufflers, etc., knitting colourful woollen socks, making famous Kinnauri woollen caps, *dohrus*, *gudmas*, *kharchas*, *chuktu*, *chugdans*, etc. Thus, weaving has been the most popular household industry in Kinnaur. It has contributed substantially to the economic wellbeing of the people. Besides, among the professional handicrafts, for which Kinnaur had reputation, are the art of making images, metalware, ornaments, woollen footwear, woodcarving, etc. None of the aforementioned handicrafts have been the whole time occupations, but the supplementary activities. For most of them, winter is the most opportune

time for the people to feel relieved from the outdoor activities due to the piles of snow around; however for the artisans – the *orases*, *chomangs* and *domangs* – the show must continue year-round.

### **Hydroelectric Power Generation**

In some earlier works on Kinnaur, power generation by diverting and damming rivers has been defined as an economic activity. That may be true and agreeable in the pan-Indian context, but how that is an economic activity benefiting the people of Kinnaur, is something that has kept me puzzling all through my field visits in Kinnaur for the last many years. It is no denying the fact that Kinnaur has rich potential for power generation because of the abundance of rapids in its perennial rivers and streams. Satluj, the legendary *Shatadru* and its tributaries have great potential. According to the government estimate, the Satluj has the potential of generating 94,000 megawatts of electricity.<sup>21</sup> Of this projected figure, about 2,000 megawatts is proposed to be generated from various hydroelectric projects located in Kinnaur. The notable projects are: Sanjay Vidyut Pariyojana, Bhawa Augmentation Scheme, Nathpa Jhakri Hydroelectric Project, Baspa Hydroelectric Project and Karcham Wangtu Hydroelectric Project, Tidong Hydroelectric Project, etc.<sup>22</sup> It is a well-known fact that most of these projects are to be executed by the national and international private companies, having their own infrastructure facilities and the professional and trained workforce, which assert pressure on the existing natural resources and the deficient infrastructure facilities. Therefore, direct or indirect employment for the local people on the projects is simply insignificant, if not nil. For this, only the project authorities may not be held responsible, for the people of Kinnaur themselves lack work culture.

Against that production, Kinnaur consumes only 86,31,498 units annually for domestic, commercial, street lighting etc. There is no notified industry in Kinnaur, except a few small wood sawing units. That means most of the power shall be utilised in the down country, contributing substantially to the national economy. Under the harsh geo-climatic condition in Kinnaur and its far-flung and remote location, no economically viable industrial activity may be



An improvised project settlement.

conceivable in the foreseeable future, or at least during the effective lifespan of the proposed hydroelectric projects.

On the other hand, what the environment of Kinnaur and the people suffer because of these mega and micro projects cannot only be assessed in the material terms, but its sentimental, emotional and moral consequences have also be taken into account while working out the cost-benefit ratio of these 'development' projects. Simply by paying liberal compensation to the private land required to be acquired for the project, one cannot feel relieved of his obligation to make good the damage inflicted on the environment and public health. In fact, the incidences of pulmonary and breathing complications that earlier were very few, have increased alarmingly in the villages around the project sites. Further, uprooting of people from their traditional habitats has severe emotional and moral fallouts, which have easily been set aside by the project planners. In the context of Kinnaur, mostly little private land is involved in the projects; most of it is forest land or wasteland. Therefore, the compensation for land is also hardly of any consequence for the economic amelioration of the people, but the peripheral environmental and health hazards are also colossal in this closed and deep terrain. How far the cosmetic earth-retaining structures shall protect the already fragile geological strata of this region, highly prone to the tectonic effect, and shattered and

shaken by repeated blasting, is a question that only future can answer. The indelible scars of disastrous landslide of 31<sup>st</sup> July 2000, besides the scorched landscape at Karcham and at various other project sites, are still there for anybody to see.

The project authorities are pitifully callous about the demographic and social changes that the migrating workforce cause. There is need to consider the consequences on this account on the socio-economic condition of the local population, mostly comprising marginal farmers.

Therefore, there is dire need for a comprehensive review of the policy on the formulation of major hydropower generation projects in the fragile terrains, more so in the context of annual widespread floods in the Satluj and its tributaries. Kinnaur generates power much more than what it needs at enormous tangible and non-tangible costs. The huge surplus goes to enrich the national power grid. Therefore, Kinnaur has a legitimate claim for the equitable compensation. If at all, the power generation is to constructively contribute to the economy of Kinnaur, it can be by creating a sustainable resource base for the cultural, moral and material upliftment of the people and protection of its threatened environment. It will not only benefit Kinnaur, but also the Himalayan environment as a whole. Tremendous energy flows in the waters of Kinnaur. It must be harnessed symbiotically, but not exploited ruthlessly.

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# 5

## BELIEF-SYSTEMS AND PANTHEOLOGY

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### AUTOCHTHONOUS BELIEF-SYSTEMS

Life in the unyielding and rugged environment of Kinnaur has always been at the mercy of elements. Fragile and serrated ridges, awe-inspiring snow-clad peaks and the furious and foaming Satluj flowing, wildly at the bottom, have been responsible to evolve numerous quintessential belief-systems around the terrifying geographical features and natural phenomena. The fluxion of those belief-systems may be found crystallised in the form of various village-level deities. In lower Kinnaur these deities are represented by their *mukhang*, i.e. the *mohras* (face-images). These *mukhangs* are mounted on the wooden *rathang*, i.e., a *rath* (a type of jampan) in the manner similar to the ones found in the neighbouring districts of Himachal Pradesh. The jampanies (*chalamiya* or *kahars*) carry these *devtas*, installed on the *raths*, on their shoulders.

### The Bon Legacy

Before the advent of Buddhism in the Tibetan world, the Kirats (the Sino-Tibetan speaking people of the Mongolian stock) followed a crude type of primitive religion, known as the *Bon chos*, i.e., the cult of Bon pas. That cult was also known as the *Lha chos*, i.e., the cult of spirits, identified with the *gLing-chos* of Ladakh by Francke.<sup>1</sup> As an instance of the residuum of that tradition in upper Kinnaur may be the deities being represented by a long wooden poles, called

*phabrang*. At the upper end of that pole, a face-image of the deity is fixed. The *phabrang* is lavishly decked with colourful silken sheets, ribbons, etc. Customarily the *phabrang* has to be lifted upright and carried by only one person at a time. Touching it on the ground is regarded ominous, and a black goat has to be sacrificed for expiation.

Among the autochthonous deities of Kinnaur, the Yulsa and Dabala clan of deities have wider following. These deities are usually identified with the name of villages where these have their temples.

The Yulsa clan of *devtas* are the village gods (*yul* means a village and *sa* means a deity), but Yulsa is believed to have come to Kinnaur from Lhasa. This deity is represented by a three-metre long wooden pole. The *devtas* of Yulsa clan have temples at Namgia, Hango, Sannam, Ropa, Shalkar, Chango, etc. Each of these deities has a local legend.

According to the Dabala tradition, he was chased by a yak, ran from Lhasa and took shelter in a cave at Kanam. The deities belonging to the Dabala clan are nine in all. Of these, three are sisters and six brothers, each of them having a temple at a separate village. Among the three sisters, the one at Poo is the goddess *Khro-mo-min*, at Dubling is goddess *Pal-lim-bzang-mo* and at Khab is the goddess *Ju-ti-dung-mo*. Of the six brothers, the god *Chags-drul* is at Kanam, the god *Chos-lha bzang-rig-pa* resides at Dawling, the god *Tsa-khang* is at Lid or Sarkhung, the god *Klu-'abrug bkra-shis* lives at Shyaso, the god *gSer-jen-chen-po* has his temple at Namgia and the god *dMag-gi-dpon-po* lives at Yangthang (Hangrang).<sup>2</sup> However, there are temples dedicated to Dabala at Hango and Chango also.

The primitive animistic, magical and sorcerous elements of the pre-Buddhist Bon legacy are also deeply ingrained in many customary rituals in Kinnaur, especially in the upper part. The *chakheb* for invoking rain-god, the *sKurim* for averting calamity, the *bhunkur* for increasing fertility of soil, etc. are some of such Bon rites that possibly were inducted into the Himalayan Buddhism by Padm-sambhav and perpetuated by the lamas.<sup>3</sup> However, this aspect calls for a detailed research.

The tradition of offering stones on the high passes at various places in Kinnaur may find its roots in the ancient pastoral nomadic practice of the Khash, who had to brave violent blizzards and snowstorms on the high Himalayan passes in the remote past. In order to ensure safety for their herds from the fury of those elements, they deified them as the *Ludr*, which in the course of time became the Brahmanical *Rudr*, and started propitiating him on the mountain passes by making offerings of stones – the only conceivable offering on such an unearthly places. The relics of that ancient Khash practice may still be found on the mountaintops in Kinnaur in the form of *shekhar* or *shakari*. Those stone stacks are also associated with the ancestor worship.

### Cults of Purgyal and Raldang

Besides the ancient tradition of *Ludr* or *Rudr* propitiation on the high mountain passes, there has been an ancient tradition of mountain worship in Kinnaur, as elsewhere in Himachal Pradesh and Himalayan interiors. While that ancient tradition of mountain worship has undergone transformation, and all the high peaks have been assigned to Shiv as his abodes outside Kinnaur, the ancient beliefs associated with the soaring peaks still hold good in Kinnaur. The two most outstanding natural features of Kinnaur are the twin Leo Purgyal peaks (6,777 metres high North Peak and 6,763 metres high South Peak) on the Zaskar range are the highest ones in Himachal Pradesh, and the 6,716 metres high Mount Kinnar Kailash is the most captivating physical feature of the mid-Kinnaur region. The traditional name of the twin Leo Purgyal peaks is *Gung-ri* and the Mount Kinnar Kailash is traditionally known as *Raldang*. Both these dominating mountain features have been the object of wonder, awe and reverence for the people of Kinnaur through ages, as one local rhyme about these sacred peaks tells:

*"Tise gangskyi rgyelpo yin,  
Purgyal ri rgyelpo yin,  
Mas pang mthsoyi rgyelpo yin."*

That is:



Kailash is the king of glaciers,  
Purgyal is the king of mountains,  
Mansarovar is the king of lakes.<sup>4</sup>

The cult of *Purgyal Lha* is confined to Nako and neighbouring villages in upper Kinnaur. A local tradition associated with the mysterious *Gung-ri* or *Purgyal* tells that once on those peaks lived a fabulous '*aBa-yul*', i.e., the spirits, which, none but only the ordained lamas could see or hear. When the holy men approached the eternal snow on the peaks, they heard the voices of invisible denizens or the barking of ghostly dogs, but saw nothing. The inhabitants of villages located below the peaks hold these peaks in high esteem as the *Purgyal Lha*, i.e., the Purgyal Devta, because these peaks provide perennial supply of water to these villages. It is for the abundant flow of water from the mountain slopes that Nako is a pleasant oasis in the vast trans-Himalayan cold desert.

Among the clusters of scenic peaks soaring high above the tall deodar trees that form an idyllic backdrop for the Chini-Kalpa-Reckong Peo township, the holy peak of Kinnar Kailash is the most important. The traditional name of this peak is *Raldang*, which later became known as the Kailash (the Abode of Shiv), and still later as the Kinnar Kailash – similar to the Kailash Mansarovar – under



The sacred Kinnar Kailash.

the Brahmanical influence. Circumambulating the *Raldang*, i.e., the *Kinnar-Kailash Parikrama* is considered a religious merit not only among the people of Kinnaur, but also among the people of neighbouring areas. We have discussed that parikrama in 12<sup>th</sup> chapter.

### Cult of Maishur

Although, most of the indigenous faith-systems of Kinnaur have been incessantly undergoing metamorphism under the predominating Brahmanical influences, thereby losing their primitive vigour and intensity, yet the age-old cult of *Maishur* is still holding ground. In Kinnaur, especially in the lower part, it is the most dominating cult-system. Many scholars have projected *Maishur* as the quintessential version of the classical Mahasur or Mahashiv, but such interpretation of autochthonous *Maishur* can at best be attributed to the Brahmanical bias. In fact, there is a need to deeply examine the cult of *Maishur* in a wider spatio-temporal format, because there already exists an identical cult-system centered around *Mahasu* in a large geographical area of the Giri-Pabbar-Tons watershed in upper Shimla, the trans-Giri segment of Sirmaur districts and the adjoining part of Mandi district in Himachal Pradesh, and Jaunsar-Bawar area of Dehradun district of Uttarakhand, where the Khash population predominates. Major bulk of population in lower Kinnaur also belongs to the Khash stock. The Khashas are the ardent votaries of Mahasu Devta at Hanol. Therefore, the *Maishur-Mahasu* linkage is an important topic that deserves an in-depth and unbiased study, notwithstanding the different traditions about the genesis of both these cults.<sup>5</sup>

The pantheistic system under the cult of *Maishur*, now comprising five of them and their spouses (sisters, according to one tradition), is quite elaborate and complex. Each of them is identified by the name of village where he has his principal temple. It is said that originally there were three *Maishur* as: *Maishur* of Sungra, *Maishur* of Chagaon and *Maishur* of Bhaba. Among these, *Maishur* of Sungra is the eldest. Later, two more *Maishur*: *Maishur* of Poari and *Maishur* of Mahbar were added to complete the *Maishur* pentad. There is also a *Maishur* at village Pujarali of Rohru tehsil in Shimla district.

According to the tradition recorded in numerous folksongs, all the *Maishur* were born to Hirima, the legendary Hidimba of the *Mahabharat*, from Banasur at Kafaur. It is obligatory on all the *Maishurs* of Kinnaur to visit their mother at village Kafaur on the annual fair held in her honour. Hidimba is also known to have married Bhim, one of the Pandav brothers, at Dhungri (Manali) in Kullu district, and from that marriage, Ghatotkachh was born to her at Dhungri. Thus, the *Maishurs* of Kinnaur and Ghatotkachh became the uterine brothers. Ghatotkachh has temples to him at village Sidhama in Kullu district and at village Ruhadu and Bagi in Mandi district.

Hirima lives in an all-wooden temple at Kafaur, the first village of Kinnaur. The peculiarity about this village is that all old houses of this village are covered only with wooden planks. This demoness is the cult-goddess at many other places in Himachal Pradesh. For instance, she has temples at village Jahlama in Lahul (Lahul & Spiti district) and at villages Khajiyar, Badaka, Nera and Chamba town in Chamba district. However, she has her loftiest wooden temple at Dhungri (Manali) in Kullu district. How deeply the Brahmanical traditions have influenced the local belief-system and how inextricably the local characters and folklore have mingled with the classical traditions of the *Mahabharat* may well be adjudged from the *Maishur* pantheology.

All the five *Maishurs* of Kinnaur have their spouses. These are Ukha at Bara Kamba, Ukha of Nichar, Chitralkha at Taranda, Durga (Nagin) of Chhota Kamba and Pirasan of Nathpa. Each of these goddesses has a wooden temple to her built in the typically local style of architecture. Besides, *Maishurs* have many other brothers and sisters. Among those, Chandika of Kothi is important one, besides there are other deaf and dumb brothers and sisters. One of such physically challenged goddess is the Durga of Chagaon.

Each of *Maishur* has a magnificent wooden temple at his bona fide place of residence, but the temple of *Maishur* of Sungra at village Sungra is the most pompous and a unique one. It is an excellent example of the wood-based Himalayan architecture. Technically speaking, it is a one-piece portable massive wooden structure resting on the sturdy plinth beams, and not 'founded'

on the ground. All these temples are located in lower Kinnaur, bordering on Shimla district. This segment of Kinnaur is a veritable 'buffer zone' between the area towards the southwest, where the Brahmanical traditions of the mainland predominate and upper Kinnaur towards northeast, where the Himalayan Buddhism is the only way of life.

### Snake Gods of Kinnaur

Besides, the aforementioned local cults, the omnibus ophiolatry has been the most dominant indigenous cult-system in Kinnaur, as else where in the Western Himalayan region. However, ophiolatry has flourished here in numerous local manifestations around the female and male serpent deities. It is a veritable *Naglok*, i.e., the realm of snakes. There are as many as forty temples dedicated to *Nag* deities in Kinnaur. Of these, thirteen are defined as *Nag* temples, and remaining twenty-seven are dedicated to the ambivalent *Narain* deities. Only four of these are located in the upper northeastern part, and as many as thirty-six are located in the lower southwestern part. These snake gods are: Kul Dev *Narain* and Baisharia (Bashahru) *Nag* at Namgia, *Narain* (*Narayung*) at Asrang, *Nag* at Ribba, *Narain* at Yuwarangi, *Narain* at Rogi, *Nag* at Mahbar, *Narain* at Chini, *Nag* at Warang, *Shesh Nag* at Pangi, *Narain* at Kalpa, *Ishwar Narain* at Purbani, *Narain* at Ramani, *Narain* at Punang, *Nag* at Nichar, *Nag* at Bari, *Nag* at Magpa, *Kamshu Narain* at Bhava Bai, *Nag* at Nathapa, *Narain* at Bhaba Kargaon, *Jal Nag* at Yula, *Seraga Narain* at Miru, *Nagin* at Chhota Kamba, *Narain* at Yula, *Devta Narain* at Rupri, *Bahi Narain* at Urni, *Narain* at Punang, *Narain* at Ramni, *Nag* at Bari, *Narain* at Sannam, *Narain* at Jani, *Narain* at Gharshu, *Narain Devta* at Kilba, *Bahi Narain* at Betsering, *Nag* at Sangla, *Narain* at Shong, *Narain* at Barua, *Piri Narain* at Sapni, *Narain* at Chasu, *Narain* at Rakchham.

In lower Kinnaur, the snake-cults are generally village-specific and quintessential in character, which make them stand out from the rest of genre outside Kinnaur. People here have great faith in these gods and they have built magnificent wooden temples in the traditional architectural style for them at different places. How dominant has been the ophiolatry and other autochthonous cults



Temple of *Narains* and *Nagin* at Chini.

in Kinnaur, especially in the lower part, despite the Buddhistic influence from the north and northeast and Brahmanism from the southwest, may be known from the fact that the Bushahr kingdom, of which Kinnaur formed the most important and major part, was named after the local *Nag* deity – *Bashahru Nag*, who resides in a magnificent wooden temple at village *Bashahru*, northeast of *Rampur* town. The influence of snake cult does not end only with the *Bashahru Devta*, but higher up in Kinnaur area, the ophiolatry is a dominant-cult system.

With the exception of a few, who are believed to have migrated to Kinnaur from different places as far as Tibet, most of the snake gods of Kinnaur are regarded to be the lord of subterranean sources of water. They are synonymously addressed as *Nag* and *Narain* to represent their all-pervasive and ambivalent character. As *Nag*, they are represented by natural streams, lakes, etc. and as *Narain*, they are the ambivalent clan-deities (*kulaja*) or village deity (*gram-devta* or *gana-devta*). The folk belief that regards them as the lord of subterranean sources of water is affirmed from the traditions

associated with the origin of many of them from the Duling Lake on the Buran (Borando) pass or the lake at Paunda.

There is an interesting legend about the origin of snakes from the Duling Lake. It tells that once a girl of village Paunda was married in village Brua. There was no water near the village, and the women of village had to fetch water from Baspa river, deep in the gorge. Once the girl went to her parents' home and narrated her woes of carrying water from the ravine. Her father promised to alleviate her misery. He gave her a covered basket with the instruction to keep it covered en route and only open it in the cowshed of her house after closing the doors. However, the young woman could not resist the temptation of knowing what the basket contained. So near Wangtu, she raised the lid just to peep inside, and immediately one snake slid out and disappeared in the nearby thicket, wherefrom a stream of water gushed out. She repeated that mistake near Karcham and below Sapni, at Kandralas, only to find a snake running out of the basket each time and disappearing in the bushes or boulders from where the water gushed out.

When she reached her home, she was left with only four snakes in the basket. As directed by her father, she took the basket with the remaining four snakes in it to the cowshed, closed it and after offering *dhoop*, opened the magic-basket. And lo! The whole cowshed was filled with water. The woman was relieved of carrying water from distance thereafter.

The news of that miracle soon spread and other women of the village felt very jealous of her. They hatched a conspiracy to destroy that source of water. They engaged a witch for the purpose, who prevailed upon the young woman not to use the water from the spring in her cowshed lest she should be harmed. She advised her to mix filth in the spring and burn *dhoop* so that the snakes might come out to escape, and to hack them with a sickle. The young woman did as advised by the witch, and as soon as the snakes appeared, those were done to death and their pieces thrown down the cliff. However, to the chagrin of both of them, all the pieces got joined together into a very long snake. It sped past Sapni castle to the mountain and disappeared in the Duling Lake atop the Buran pass (4,725 metres), from where a stream flowed out.

After sometime, a shepherd got an ingot of gold from the lake-



*Narains and Nagin on their raths.*

side. He thought of getting a *mohra* (face-image) of a deity made of that ingot. Accordingly, he engaged a goldsmith, but when he made the *mohra*, it turned into a trinity. Each face-image of that trinity flew away and settled on a peak above Sapni, where they defined the area of their territory. The first *mohra* settled at Brua in Kinnaur, the second at Pekha in Rohru and the third at *Da-pang* (Sapni). That is how the three *Nags* of Kinnaur were born. Every snake god of Kinnaur has many legends of its origin, and narrating them may be beyond the scope of this work.<sup>6</sup> All the *Nags* of Kinnaur are required to pay homage at Duling Lake, the mother-source of their origin, once in a year.

These snake gods are normally not considered as the granter of rain. However, there are certain snake gods who are approached, though rarely, for that purpose as well. The instance of Chhakoling Dambar of village Labrang, which I have narrated in the context of Labrang Castle in the 11<sup>th</sup> Chapter is an example to the point. The reason for not regarding snake gods as the granter of rain may be that the rain here is very scanty, and it is of not much consequence for the agriculture. On the other hand, the snake gods of Kinnaur have made available to the people ample sources of underground water seeping from the perennial snowfields to

sustain life and agriculture. Therefore, while the people are very conscious of their underground water-sources and accord highest reverence to the *Nags*, they hardly bother for the rain.

Obviously, the *Nag* deities are very powerful *devtas* of Kinnaur. As the *Nags*, they provide the life-sustaining water, and as the *Narains*, they grant fecundity, fertility and plenitude to the people. In the pantheistic hierarchy, the *Nags* or *Narains* are regarded only next to *Maishur*. How highly the *Nags* are placed in Kinnaur may well be understood from the *chironing* (known as *dev-bharatha*) of Nag Devta of Sangla. It says:

"O thou, who livest within the well, who livest in holes,  
who canst go into a vessel, who canst swiftly run, who  
livest in the water, on the precipice, upon the trees, in  
the wasteland, among the meadows, who hast power  
like the thunderbolt, who livest within the hollow trees,  
among the rocks, within the caves, be victorious."<sup>7</sup>

Transmigrating from one place to the other by riding on or sticking to the animate or inanimate bodies has been a peculiar idiosyncrasy of the native gods, especially the *Nag devtas*. The *Nag* deities in particular use the women for such errands. For instance, the *Narain Devta* of Kilba is known to have stuck to a bride and travelled to village Pangti, where she was married. The preference of *Nags* or *Narains* for women is not only confined to using them as vehicles, but also in most of the legends associated with the human sacrifices to the snake gods, the victims are invariably the females. Exceptions to this rule are the legends that emanated from Lahul, where the victims have been the males. Incidents of various indigenous gods transmigrating with the persons returning home from the pilgrimage, fair or temple, are well known in Kinnaur. The incidents of immigration of 'aliens' became so alarming that the customary practice of taking the *Nag* gods of Kinnaur to the sacred Baral Lake had to be checked. That lake, situated somewhere on the border of Garhwal with Tibet, has been the place of origin to many snake gods of Kinnaur. Therefore, every snake god of Kinnaur, with his *grokch* and other functionaries, is obliged to occasionally visit that place. However, more often than not, while returning home, the *grokch* of each *Nag* god of Kinnaur has to go into trance and find out if any of the person or object accompanying



the deity is not 'loaded' with the alien divine burden from the holy lake. It is believed that the surroundings of Baral Lake are heavily infested with innumerable forest and mountain spirits. On one of such visits, the *Nagas* at Sangla carried with him from that lake a snake god, who had to be installed in a temple at Rakchham. Having become wiser by that instance, the *Nagas* of Sangla rarely visited that lake thereafter. However, the interloper started harassing the people to press his demands for a separate temple.

To check such intrusions, the *grokchs* of *Nag* gods of Kinnaur would routinely stop midway while returning home and ascertain through divination that no interloper accompanied them. If found out, the intruding deity was appeased with adequate sacrifice and made to pull back. Nevertheless, some stubborn intruders would not relent and insist on being accommodated. In such instances, they are settled in some neighbouring hamlets to their satisfaction. Thus, several minor *Nag* gods have settled in lower Kinnaur courtesy such pilgrimage jaunts of *Nagas* of Sangla. However, the intruder is obliged to occupy a subordinate position vis-à-vis the existing village or clan-god in all such cases.<sup>8</sup>

Another interesting legend tell us that in the earlier times, Rakpug Shankras, the presiding god of village Thangi, was represented by a brass image. However, once it happened that a wooden image emerged out, and it sat on the right side of the original brazen image of Rakpug Shankras. The *pujara* (priest) tried frantically to cast it away, but the interloper remained adamant. Every time, the *pujara* threw it away, it emerged again on the right side of the original image. Ultimately the *grokch* of Rakpug Shankras was called. He went into trance and found out that the wooden image belonged to an unknown intruding deity, who wanted not only to be rehabilitated, but also placed higher.

#### ADVENT OF BUDDHISM

The circumstantial evidences suggest that the message of Buddh echoed in the Western Himalayan mountains and valleys and the trans-Himalayan highlands within a few decades after the Great Decease (544 BCE). The Buddhist literary traditions – the Chinese, Japanese and the Tibetan – all tell about the original sixteen

*Sthavirs* or the Chief Apostles, who were assigned different countries and regions to propagate the *Dharm*. Several of them outlived Buddh. Of them, Sthavir Angir is known to have gone to the *Te-Se* mountain (Kailash) around the Mansarovar Lake. Sthavir Kanakvats went to the Saffron Peak, which obviously may be Kashmir. The Gilgit MSS records that the Nags were the first to embrace Buddhism in the Saffron Peak. Therefore, it is with good reasons that we come across innumerable folk traditions about the spread of Buddhism by those *sthavirs* in the Western Himalayan region as far as the Yamuna basin. Sthavir Bhadr was deputed to Jamunadvip. The exact location of that country cannot be identified. However, it may be assumed that Jamunadvip was located in the mountainous interior of the Yamuna basin. Another *sthavir*, named *Mi-p'yed* in Bhoti, is known to have gone to the Himalay, probably the Central Himalayan region.<sup>9</sup> How far those *sthavirs* fared in their mission is anybody's guess, because in the absence of any material evidence of those early Buddhist activities in the Western Himalayan interiors, the fate of those pioneer *sthavirs'* accomplishments cannot be known.

There are numerous tangible archaeological and traditional evidences to suggest that Mahayan Buddhism proliferated in the Western Himalayan interiors and in the trans-Himalayan region under the Kushans, especially during the reign of Kanishk (CE 78-101). Although, such evidences have not so far been found in Kinnaur, yet we come across literary evidences to suggest the existence of Buddhist culture in Kinnar region. According to the *Shan-Chien-Pi-Po-Sha*,<sup>10</sup> specific penal provision (*prajika*) existed for a *bhikkhu* who indulged in sex with a *Kinnari*. That provision may reasonably suggest that the Buddhist monks were active in the land where the Kinnars lived as early as the CE 1<sup>st</sup> century or may be even earlier.<sup>11</sup> That Kinnar country may probably be the present-day Kinnaur. How far those Buddhist missionaries succeeded in proselytizing the Kinnars may not be known, but it may reasonably be assumed that their efforts in that country might have remained half-hearted, possibly fearing the persecution. After the Kushans had passed out of scene, the missionary activities could hardly keep up for a want of intellectual support in that hostile region for longer. Consequently, the people might have reverted back to

their primitive ways. Possibly for that reason, no oral or material evidence of the Indian (classical) Buddhism has so far been found in Kinnaur. On the other hand, there are numerous evidences – oral, customary or material – to establish that the people remained wedded to their primitive cults and beliefs until the advent of Buddhism from Tibet, (which may aptly be defined as the Himalayan Buddhism) during the middle ages.

We come across one isolated evidence to suggest that the legacy of Indian Buddhist intellectual culture existed in the distant upper Kinnaur as late as 9<sup>th</sup> century. One Pal-brtsegs of sKa (village Ka in sub-tehsil Hangrang) was in the body formed of the Indian scholars and translators and the Tibetan translators that King Ralpachen (CE c. 877-899) of Central Tibet constituted. Pal-brtsegs is known to have translated the *Vajrodaya* text (*rDo-rje-lbyun*), *Chos-kyi-gyal-tshan* and *Prajnapad* (*Ye-shes-zabs*) into Bhoti.<sup>12</sup>

One of the greatest scholars of Buddhism and the greatest builder of the monasteries, Lotsab Rinchen Sangpo (CE 958-1055), is also believed to have been born in Kinnaur. From his various biographies (*rNam-thar*), it is revealed that the ancestors of Rinchen Sangpo moved from Lalung (Lha-lun) in Lingti valley of Spiti, to a place named Radnis, to the south of Tiak on the left bank of Satluj in Kyu-wang. There he was born on the 10<sup>th</sup> day of the last month of summer in the Earth Horse Year (corresponding to CE 958). There is also a folk tradition prevalent at village Sumra to suggest that he was born in that village. Village Sumra is situated on the right bank of Spiti river in Hangrang sub-division of Kinnaur district and may be considered to be in the geographical proximity of Lha-lun and Radnis. Thus, though the exact place of his birth may be uncertain, yet it certainly was somewhere in the upper Satluj region, possibly in Spiti valley.<sup>13</sup> A tradition associated with the wooden image of Buddha in Guru Ghantal monastery at Tupchiling in Lahul tells that it was installed by a lama named Rinchen Sangpo from Kinnaur some eight hundred years ago. Although, that tradition appears to be dubious, yet it affirms the traditional belief that the Great Lotsab belonged to Kinnaur.<sup>14</sup>

It may be ironic, in the land where Lotsab Rinchen Sangpo, the greatest builder of the Buddhist temples and monasteries was born, the Himalayan Buddhism could not establish itself as firmly

and puritanically as it did in the rest of Western Tibet (*Ngari-Korsum*). It is as lax here as Brahmanism is in lower Kinnaur. Nevertheless, among the temples and monasteries attributed to Lotsab Rinchen Sangpo, Kinnaur has the distinction of having maximum of them. As many as fourteen villages having temples and monasteries founded by the Great Lotsab, or associated by tradition with him or of his period, have already been identified in the district. There is every chance that more of Lotsab foundations may become known on further investigation.

According to the biography of Lotsab Rinchen Sangpo, entitled *Bla-ma-lotstsh-ba-chen-pohi rnam-par-thar-pah Dri-ma-med-pa-shel-gyi-hPhren zes-bya-ba*, which his immediate disciple dPal-ye-Shes compiled,<sup>15</sup> the Great Lotsab founded Buddhist establishments in Kinnaur at the localities: (1) *Bori (Pho-ri)* Poari, on the left bank of Satluj opposite to Reckong Peo, (2) *Ro-pag* (identified as Ropa by Joseph Gergan), (3) *Trang* (probably Hangrang or Hango), (4) *rTsa-rang* (Charang in upper Kinnaur), (5) *dPag* (Gru-dPag in Baspa valley), (6) *Ka-num* in *Nga-ra* (Kanam), (7) *sPu* in *Rong-Chung* on the Satluj near *Hrib-skyes*, i.e., the present-day Poo, where the *Lotsab-bai-lha-khang* still exists, (8) *Ho-bu-lan-ka*, i.e., *Hobulangka* (Chini). Even today, the locality between Pangri and Chini is called *Ho-bo*. According to popular traditions, Lotsab Rinchen Sangpo is known to have founded monasteries in many other villages. Among those localities: (1) *Chuling*, (2) *Ra-rang* (Rarang), and (3) *Ribba* are notable. Besides, there are many other villages in Kinnaur, where monasteries contemporaneous with the period of Rinchen Sangpo (11<sup>th</sup> century) are located. Among those villages, the notable ones are: (1) *Sisu* (Shyaso), where a *chos-khor* exists, (2) *Nako*, where a *Lo-tsab Lha-khang* exists, and (3) *Kyahar* (Shalkar).

The fact that the kings of Guge extended patronage to the temple-building activity in a very large and scattered area down in the Satluj valley beyond their territory, and wholeheartedly financed it cannot simply be explained on the religious ground. Besides gaining religious merit, the rulers of Guge were also covertly gaining a political advantage by that enterprise. By patronising the founding of Buddhist temples and monasteries in the peripheral region of Kinnaur, the kings of Guge were strategically extending their political arm in the guise of *Dharm* over a country that was

deeply steeped in the *Bon* traditions. The economic expediency might have also been the other compelling reason for such religio-political penetration. The greener and thickly-wooded region of Kinnaur could provide to the rulers of Western Tibet with ample supply of timber and many other basic necessities that were extremely scarce in the arid and arctic region of the trans-Himalayan kingdoms.

Buddhism entered in Kinnaur from the Western Tibetan kingdom of Guge and it extended downwards in Satluj valley. While, it flourished vigorously in upper Kinnaur, its intensity waned gradually downstream. In the lower part of Kinnaur, the people continued to pursue their autochthonous beliefs and traditions, which came under the pressure of Buddhism from north and Brahmanism from the mainland towards the south. Thus, the people of lower Kinnaur, although still pursuing their traditional beliefs and practices, are as much the followers of Buddhism as they are of Brahmanism. Out of Kinnaur, only not-very-old and neglected Buddh temple stood near the bus stand at Rampur. That temple has lately been rebuilt into an elaborate modern structure.

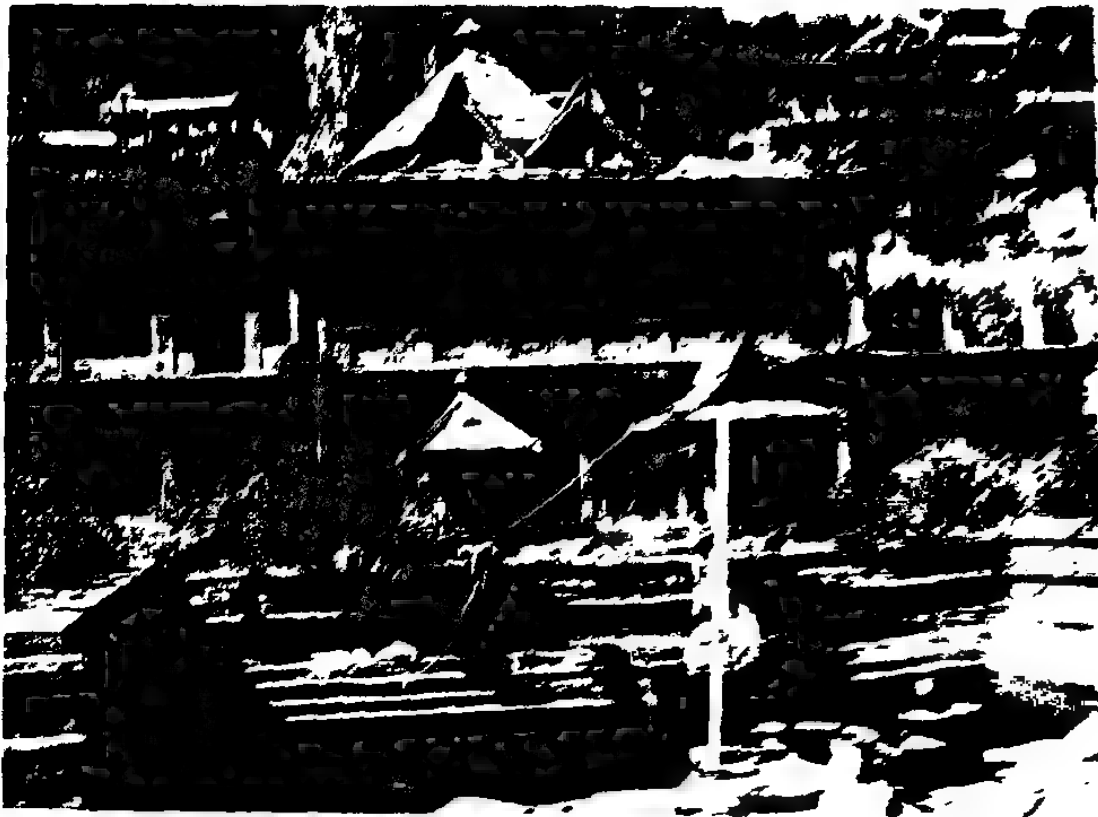
#### BRAHMANICAL INROADS

Brahmanical cults probably entered Kinnaur with the foundation of new kingdom (that was later named as Bushahr kingdom) at Mone in the Baspa valley above village Sangla. That new-found petty kingdom expanded by assimilating petty *thakurais* in the Satluj valley. The Brahmanical cult of Badrinath is also known to have been planted by the new rulers. However, despite feudal patronage, the passive cult of Badrinath could not find roots in the popular religious environment. The people of the area had since ages been the followers of numerous local cults based on sacrificial rituals. Therefore, the passive cult of Badrinath could not find favour with them.

Lord Badrinath has a temple in the Kamru castle premises. According to the age-old tradition, the crowning ceremony of the Bushahr rulers was performed in that shrine at Kamru until the recent past. There is also a temple dedicated to him and Ayodhyath at Rampur, the capital-town of the erstwhile Bushahr state.

Besides, there is a small stone temple of Narsing outside the Bhimakali temple complex at Sarahan. However, neither at Kamru nor at Sarahan have these Vaishnav deities any role in the traditional religious environment of the area. Interestingly, in fact, according to a document of CE 1869 that Rahul Sankrityayan discovered in the old records in Kamru castle, the Badrinath of Kamru was considered as an incarnation of the Buddha until last century.<sup>16</sup>

The new rulers wisely adopted the native gods and goddesses into the Brahmanical fold to establish their control over the people. They gave new Brahmanical identity to the native deities without disturbing the traditional cultic practices. Accordingly, the goddess of the capital-village was renamed as *Kumukhya*, i.e., *Kamakhya*, and accordingly the name of that village was changed from *Meme* to *Kamru*, i.e., *Kamrup* after the name of goddess. The goddess at Kothi was named as *Chandika* and the ones at Sapri and Sarahan were renamed as *Bhimakali*. Under that process of proselytising, the local *Nagas* and *Maishur* cults were also interpreted in the *Puranic* context and the *Nagas* and *Maishur* deities were regarded as the local manifestations of the classical *Nag* and *Shiv*. In that



Bhairav temple at Kothi.

process of religio-cultural syncretism, a highly ambivalent and complex pantheistic system developed in this 'buffer zone' between Sarahan and Pangi Nala in lower Kinnaur. Significantly, the local deities regard the Brahmanical Vaishnav deities as inferior in the pantheistic hierarchy.

Thus, the type of belief-system that has developed here is neither the Brahmanical Hinduism of the mainland nor the Himalayan Buddhism of upper Kinnaur and rest of the trans-Himalayan region. However, it is an interfused form of both, with an overbearing influence of the traditional local cults. Thus, having faith in their native gods and goddesses closer to their hearts, the people here are as much Hindus as they are Buddhists. This peculiar pantheistic syncretism has contributed to the evolution of ambivalent cult-system in this 'buffer zone.' The native deities, who essentially are terrific, violent and demanding in nature, are propitiated notwithstanding the fact that those have been redefined as the Brahmanical deities. On the other hand, the Vajrayan Buddhist deities are worshipped by all with equanimity. That practice is essentially not different from the universal practice of the exigent propitiation of the malevolent and daily worship of the benevolent even in the mainland India. That religious dualism may be attributed to the ethno-cultural uniqueness of this region. Despite the geophysical barriers, Kinnaur has remained influenced by the socio-cultural ethos of the Indian mainland since the earliest times through the religious, social, cultural and economic contacts. Those contacts have greatly contributed to the emergence of an integrative quintessential ambivalent pantheistic system that revolves around the native, Buddhist and Brahmanical cult-systems.

The Brahmanical influence from the mainland has also been responsible for introducing caste-based social setup in this region. The traditional Kinnauri society had been unstratified and wholesome, having only the professional categories, and not the caste-based divisions.<sup>17</sup> Consequently, the *Chomangs*, *Chamars* (cobblers) and *Domangs* (smiths) came to be considered as the low castes. While this distinction still covertly holds good in lower Kinnaur, it has become feebler and non-existent as one moves upwards to the area where the Himalayan Buddhism prevails.

Of late, several religio-reformist movements of the mainland

have also become popular in this region. For instance, under the influence of Radhaswami and Nirankari movements, many locals have now stopped eating non-vegetarian foods despite the fact that meat has been the traditional staple food of the people in the area. The influence of these neo-reformist movements may be seen even in the traditional sacrificial rites. For instance, in the Chandika temple at Kothi, where the sacrificing of goats has been an accepted customary practice, the trumpery images made of *satoo* are offered to the goddess.

What is far more interesting is the fact that the influence of Brahmanical traditions came to this 'buffer zone' from the mainland through Garhwal side, and not through the traditional and convenient Satluj valley route. Its influence largely remained confined to the conversion and adoption of the tantric goddesses of the Mahayan Buddhism that had remained dominant in the entire Western Himalayan region since the Kushan period. For that reason, the ambivalent form of Shakti cult has remained dominant in this 'buffer zone' only. Downstream of Sarahan, the passive Vaishnav and Shaiv cults predominate. The anterior predominant position of the Indian Mahayan Buddhist traditions in this 'buffer zone' may also explain as to why the Himalayan Buddhism could not extend beyond Pangri Nala downstream in the Satluj valley. Even the temple building enterprise of Rinchen Sangpo (*Rin-chen-bzang-po*) remained confined up to Chini (ancient Hobulangka) and Poari (ancient Bari or Pho-ri) villages on its northern extremity.

Although, the cult of Pandav is very powerful in the adjoining Shimla district and neighbouring Garhwal area of Uttarakhand, but it is conspicuous by its absence in Kinnaur. However, by way of exception, there are five images embossed on a silver sheet enshrined in the temple of Dabala Devta at Kanam. People regard these images of recent date as of the Pandav.

### References

1. Francke, A.H., *Antiquities of Indian Tibet*, New Delhi (1972 reprint), Vol. I, p. 21.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 21.



non-Buddhist Bon people. Among the followers of Buddhism, the practice of polyandry was discouraged and that practice was replaced by *bTsun gral*, under which the younger brothers and sisters in the family were obliged to become celibate monks and nuns in the monasteries and nunneries. We have discussed the institution of *bTsun gral* under the heading 'Family Structure' that follows next. On the other hand, racio-cultural interfusion had been vigorous, leading to the love-and-hate relationship in the Yamuna basin. Under that situation, the Khash could imbibe many Kirat customs and practices – polyandry and *khoond* institutions being the two of them. Incidentally, it is in Yamuna basin that most of the Pandav and Kaurav cult-centres are located. With the passage of time, those practices spread with the matrimonial and socio-cultural contacts in the interiors of Satluj basin and in lower Kinnaur.

Thus, an undercurrent of that disparity has persisted in the socio-cultural behaviour of the upper and lower segments of Kinnaur. For instance, the Himalayan Buddhism is firmly rooted in the Kirat-dominated upper Kinnaur, whereas the ambivalent form of Brahmanised indigenous cults predominate in lower Kinnaur. Similarly, while the Kirat-dominated Buddhist society of upper Kinnaur is virtually classless, the higher caste people in lower Kinnaur define themselves as the *Khoshia*, i.e., the Khash,<sup>1</sup> and the non-*Khoshia* locals are known as the *Beru*. They constitute the lower strata of society. The *Khoshias* live at a distance from the *Beru* settlements.

The *Khoshia* society of Kinnaur has traditionally been stratified into three *maorechh* (also known as the *khels*), i.e., the status-based categories – the *Orang*, the *Morang* and the *Waza*. Although, this *maorechh* system has lost much of its sheen under the prevailing socio-cultural scenario, yet it matters a lot within the inter-community dealings. Among these *maorechh*, the *Orangs* rank highest in the social ladder. Following them are the *Morangs*, and the *Wazas* trailing at the third position. The *Orangs* dominate the Kinnaura society in almost every field: economic, political and religious. The *maorechh* system had been strictly endogamous, and one could transgress it only at the risk of social degradation. However, under the changed conditions, the *maorechh* system has become very lax,

and inter-*maorechh* marriages are now common. The *maorechh* are further divided into *khandans* and sub-*khandans* and so on until one ends up in a family unit. The significant aspect of the *maorechh* system is that it has been vigorous in lower Kinnaur, where the Brahmanic influence from the mainland has been significant. It has been milder and diffused in the middle part beyond Kalpa upto Poo, and non-existent in the Buddhist upper Kinnaur.

The *Berus* are traditionally identified into three professional guilds: the *Orases*, the *Domangs* and the *Chomangs*. The *Orases* are very skilled hereditary woodworkers. They have been one of the proficient woodcarvers in the Himalayan region. The *Domangs* are the hereditary ironworkers, but they also excel in gold and silver work. The paper-thin jewellery of the Kinnauri damsel is their hallmark. The gold and silver workers among the *Domangs* are known as the *Sunars*. The *Chomangs* are the leather workers, but they are also the proficient weavers, and do tailoring jobs as well. Among the *Berus*, the *Orases* and *Domangs* are regarded higher in the social hierarchy to the *Chomangs*. The *Orases* and *Domangs* can inter-marry, but the *Chomangs* are endogamous. The *Orases* and *Domangs* can share *hookah* with the *Khoshias*, implying thereby that they are insiders in the *Khoshia* social setup. They are even allowed access to the common water sources and temples.

However, the caste distinction in Kinnaur has generally been much lax in comparison to what exists in the other neighbouring districts. For instance, all the natives of Kinnaur are now addressed as the *Negis*, at least outside Kinnaur. However, traditionally the term *negi* has been a designation for the administrative functionary under the feudal setup, equivalent to the *mehta* or *kayasth* elsewhere in the outer Himalayan kingdoms and in the mainland. This appellation is allowed only to the upper caste *Khoshia* inhabitants of Kinnaur; and not used for the people belonging to the social substratum. However, that taboo is no longer valid now, and *Negi* is now an omnibus term, applied in the generic sense for all the traditional inhabitants of Kinnaur. However, I have also noted traditional use of this appellation in the Mahasavi cultic region in Himachal Pradesh and the adjoining part of Uttarakhand, where this term is used only by the descendents of the feudal aristocracy.

### **Institution of Polyandry**

One of the most talked about topics related to Kinnaur is the institution of polyandry or the fraternal polyandry. Although, there is no specific word for polyandry in the local dialects, yet in popular usage, it is known as *pandav byah* or *pandav vivah*. One of the elderly men at village Jadi in Jaunsar area of Uttarakhand told me that such marriage is known as *jhijhoda*, but I could not confirm the veracity of that term. Although, it is now almost an extinct institution, yet the scholars have contemptuously spoken about it, without going about its genesis and socio-economic factors. Therefore, there is a need to discuss this institution in a bit detailed manner.

Polyandry has been a widely-spread institution among various communities the world over. The antiquity of this institution is indicated from the inscription describing the reforms of the Sumerian king Urukagina of Lagash (*ca.* 2300 BCE), who is known to have abolished the custom of polyandry in his country on the pain of the woman having multiple husbands being lapidated with stones upon which her crime was written.<sup>2</sup> The propitiatory injunctions in the Hebrew *Bible* (in which it amounts to adultery) and the *Quran* (that forbids *nikah ijtimah*) indicate the anterior existence of this institution among the Hebrews and pre-Islamic communities. Further, polyandry has been practised in some parts of Mongolia, Ladakh, Nepal, Bhutan, Mosuos of China, etc. Outside the Sino-Tibetan-Mongolian communities, it has been practised by the Nairs, Theeyas and Todas of South India and the Nishis of Arunachal Pradesh in India. Elsewhere, polyandry is known to exist in Sri Lanka, part of Canada, sub-Saharan Africa, parts of Kenya and Tanzania, Brazil, etc., and among the American indigenes.<sup>3</sup>

In fact, the institution of polyandry never existed among the Khash (or the *Khoshia*) race. It has only been an endemic institution among them in the area broadly defined between the Satluj and Yamuna rivers. Elsewhere, its incidences are uncommon, if not non-existent, even among the Khash. Therefore, the origin and prevalence of this institution cannot be ascribed to and identified with the Khash people in general. On the other hand, this institution remained firmly established among the Kirats – the Sino-Tibetan people. In fact, Tibet (with its racio-cultural extension in

Ladakh, Lahul & Spiti and upper Kinnaur) has been the best documented cultural domain, where the polyandry is practised despite the cleric edict against it.

Interestingly, the geographical area where the polyandry has been endemic is the same area where the cults of the heroes and villains of *Mahabharat* have been most dominant. Perhaps nowhere else are the Pandav and Kaurav so dominating cult-figures as they are in the mountainous area between the Satluj and Yamuna and the peripheral places; and this linkage of polyandry with the characters of *Mahabharat* is very important to unravel this knotty problem.

Although, the Kirat-Pandav connection may sound something queer against the plethora of narratives in the *Mahabharat* to establish close relationship among the Pandav and Kaurav. The Epic also obliquely provides sufficient reasons to suggest Kirat-Pandav linkage. The practice of polyandry among the Pandav: Draupadi marrying the five brothers and the demoness Hidimba (called Hirima in Kinnaur) courting with Bhim and Banasur are the glaring examples to the point. According to one popular legend, the demoness Hidimba lived in the upper Beas valley. She has a temple for her at Manali (Dhungri) and at Kafaur, the first village of Kinnaur, where she is regarded as the mother of all the *Maishurs*.

Besides, their uncouth and indecorous manners, as described in the *Mahabharat*, may lend credence to the non-Aryan and ethnic Kirat inheritance of the Pandav. So the name 'Pandu' (the father of Pandav) may be explained as the 'pale one', which may suggest their ethnic identity with the 'yellow' Mongolian race.<sup>4</sup> This theory is further strengthened by the fact that, though the Kurus are too often mentioned in the classical literature since the later Vedic period, yet the Pandus are conspicuous by their absence in the *Brahmans* and the *Sutras*. They appear for the first time only in the later Buddhist texts, wherein they are mentioned as a mountain tribe.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, it may be reasonable to assume that the author of *Mahabharat* introduced the Pandus from outside, possibly from the Kirat stock.

The Pandus might have had an influential sway over the native Kirat population in the mountainous interiors and that impression gave rise to numerous folk traditions among those people. Those

people eulogised the exploits of their heroes through innumerable legends and traditions, some of which found way to the *Mahabharat*. Later, when the Kirats came in contact with the Khashas, and they were assimilated into the Khash fold in the interiors between the Satluj and Yamuna, the Kirat cultural traditions also became the property of Khash. The plethora of cults of Pandav, and their counterparts, the Kaurav, are the Kirat contribution to the Khash cultural domain in the mountainous interior between Beas and Yamuna rivers. However, the main centres of these cults are concentrated in lower Kinnaur, Pabbar valley of Shimla district in Himachal Pradesh and the Rupin valley of Uttarkashi district of Uttarakhand, where the Kirat population (known as the Bhotia) has mingled extensively with the Khashia population in the northern part.

The overwhelming ancient traditions and beliefs about the association of Pandav with the age-old temples, some of them now in ruins, ruined forts, huge rocks, caves, lakes, cliffs, mounds, etc. in the interiors of Western Himalayan region provide substance to the theory that the Pandav remained dominant in this area, and that they belonged to the Kirat stock. The *shattha-pattha khoond* institution in Kinnaur and upper Shimla hills and the adjoining area of Uttarakhand may also be the relic of the Kirat-Khash antagonism. However, it came to be interpreted in the folkways as the Kaurav-Pandav rivalry under the extraneous influences from the mainland. From this discussion, it may be clear that the polyandry has not been the Khash institution, but a Kirat legacy to the Khash in lower Kinnaur and adjoining area downstream. Although, most of the people, the educated ones, are now visibly opposed to this institution according to the government statistics, yet from my field inquiries, I found it still to be one of the preferred systems of marriage.

While, practising polyandry has never been a socio-economic compulsion for the Khash living amidst the bounteous mid-Himalayan environment, it has been a socio-cultural and economic necessity for the Kirats living in the trans-Himalayan infertile cold desert. Thus, while in the Kirat country, the polyandry emerged out of the compulsion, in the Khash country, it spread out of the convenience.

Some anthropologists hold that practice of female infanticide in Tibet created shortage of females that was resolved by the fraternal polyandry. The other reason could be that the polyandry ensured check on population growth that could result in starvation. Both the above mentioned reasons have been countered by many other scholars. Eminent Tibetologist, Melvyn C. Goldstein, questions both these explanations, for female infanticide has never been institutionalised nor has there been shortage of females in Tibet, where the women enjoy considerable rights. Goldstein also disputed starvation as the reason for polyandry, arguing that polyandry was widely practised only among the land-owning families, and not among the poorest classes, prone to starvation. Therefore, the plausible reasons could be to check partition of landed property between brothers, who under the Tibetan customary rules of inheritance based on agnatic links were entitled to such division. Polyandry also appears to be associated with the aristocratic lords (*ger-ba*) to retain aristocratic titles within kin groups. In the polyandrous family, one husband could always be present in the household, while the other brothers could remain engaged in the outside jobs.

From the foregoing discussion it may be clear that polyandry has never been the Khash trait, but it crept into their social system from the Kirats. Therefore, while talking about polyandry in lower Kinnaur and adjoining Khash-dominated neighbourhood, one should be conscious about the genesis of this institution and the circumstances under which it spread among the Khash population. Although, polyandry even among the Kirat population in upper Kinnaur has been declining under the prevailing religio-cultural ferment, yet it is still sporadically prevalent there. In fact, it is vehemently favoured by the elderly people for keeping family closely-knit, preventing fragmentation of the family heirloom, controlling population and forming a strong pool of working hands for various jobs. Significantly, in the former feudal times, polyandry was encouraged by the state through penalties exacted on partitioning land-holding: in the event of brothers dividing movable property, one-half share of the whole property was appropriated by the state, and division of property was refused official recognition.<sup>6</sup>

### Marriage Systems

Besides polyandry, there are a few other types of matrimonial practices prevalent in Kinnaur. Among those, the *janetang* or *janekang* is a formal marriage decided by the parents on both the sides. The *dam tangshis* (also known as the *bennang hachis*, *jushis* or *khindup* in different localities) is, so to say, a form of love marriage. The boy and girl, having known each other for sometime, decide to enter into wedlock. Under favourable circumstances, they may approach their parents to formalise their marriage. The marriage is then consummated with the consent of parents by exchanging a bottle of *rakh* (home-made distilled liquor). However, if the lovers apprehend resistance from their parents, they may elope to some hiding place until the condition becomes favourable for them to return. Ultimately, the impasse is broken and marriage socially formalised.

The main ingredients for preparing *rakh* is *chuli* (*Prunus armeniaca*), *seau* (apple), *bemi* (*Prunus persica*), *dakhang* (grapes) and *zoud* (barley). In upper Kinnaur and other trans-Himalayan places, besides the *rakh*, people also prepare liquor from rice. That rice liquor is known as *chhang* or *ark*.

The *darosh* (also known as the *dab-dab* and *khuchis*) is the type of marriage by capture. The girl, fancied by the boy in some fair or similar occasion, is waylaid and taken away. At times, both may be known to each other, but usually they are unfamiliar to each other. This is customary and mandatory for the boy to possess her first to establish his credential as the suitor, his accomplices then perform the rest. That way, the girl knows who her suitor is and she can decide the either way. If the girl agrees, the marriage is solemnised by compromise between the parents on both sides. Marriage by force is a crime under the customary and statutory laws. Thus the consent of girl is mandatory in such marriage.

The *har* is essentially a remarriage by the wife after deserting her former husband. In that case, the new husband is obliged to compensate the former husband by *har-danang* and also indemnify himself by paying for the *izzat*.

All the above noted forms of marriage are not only peculiar to Kinnaur. Such customary marriages have been common elsewhere

also in the interiors of entire Himalayan region with different names and local customary variations. What is the striking aspect of these marriage-forms is the fact that, with the exceptions of customary gifts, dowry is almost unknown in Kinnaur and rest of the Himalayan interiors, and so is divorce rare because of the flexibility in the marriage systems and the important and predominating position of women in the social and family affairs.

In the modern times, largely during the post-independence decades, people of different persuasions, mainly belonging to the business and artisan communities have been migrating to this district for livelihood, but none of them can acquire bona fide residential status in Kinnaur, it being a 'scheduled tribe district'. Therefore, there is hardly any significant interactive relationship between the bona fide Kinnauras and the outsiders (*kocha*). Most of the outsiders either live in the residential colonies of the government or in the army quarters; thus, having almost no tangible socio-cultural rapport with the native population.

### FAMILY STRUCTURE

The women in Kinnauri social setup enjoy a prominent position and play an important role in the domestic sphere. She enjoys the same position in the social, economic and cultural life of the community. Practically no aspect of the Kinnauri family and social life is complete without the participation of women. On religious and festive occasions, their role is indispensable. They make such occasions lively not only with their dances and singing, but they also play pivotal role in the arrangements. Despite the lingering system of polyandry, she enjoys great deal of freedom in the selection of her life partner. That sexual favouritism, generating tension among the brothers, could be the significant reason for the rejection of polyandry among the Khash, who, unlike the Kirats, had no valid reason for its espousal even in the beginning. Besides, the tendency among the younger brothers to usurp the authority of the elder brother may be the other reasons against it. The women of Kinnaur are soft, generally pleasing and gentle, with a shy and modest demeanour. Despite the arduous daily routine, the contented smile is always writ large on their faces. If at all a woman in





Busy in household chores.

Kinnaur should raise her voice, it is only when she sings.

It is ironical that with the introduction of institutional Buddhism during the Second Epoch, i.e. in the CE-10<sup>th</sup> century in the Western Tibet (*Ngari-Korsum*), of which upper Kinnaur formed a part, the character of traditional institution of polyandry underwent radical transformation under the lamaistic cleric expurgation. It was transformed into a new version, under which many scholars even defined the trans-Himalayan Buddhist people as monogamous, although not correctly. In fact, the type of family system that developed in the Buddhist upper Kinnaur and other trans-Himalayan Buddhist parts may aptly be defined as the 'passive polyandry'. That reformed system not only cleansed the institution of polyandry of the stigma (of a woman having more than one husband), but also accorded to it a religious sanctity and protected all benefits of polyandry. That 'passive polyandry' is known as *bTsun gral*.

The institution of *bTsun gral* originally provided that one of the sons in a family, preferably the eldest one, should embrace monkhood and live in a monastery as a celibate monk. However, subsequently that practice was altered to the advantage of elder brother. In that form, the institution of *bTsun gral* is similar to the institution

of primogeniture insofar it confers the right of inheritance of all the family property exclusively to the eldest son, but it also additionally delegates the privilege of marriage and procreation to the eldest brother. Hence, he is known as the *khang chm pa*, i.e., the big householder. Thus, while the eldest brother enjoys the Edenic apple, the younger brothers are obliged to remain celibate as lamas in the monasteries. That institution of *bTsun gral*, combined with that foisted monogamy, causes surplus of unmarried girls, who also are obliged to remain celibate as *jomos* in the nunneries. There are some nunneries in Kinnaur, most of them in its upper part, but not as developed as the monasteries. The one of these nunneries is *gTashi Choeling* of Kanam. There is one at Nako also.

### Status of Women

As for the status of women in the family and society is concerned, Kinnaur is a veritable paradise for them. Being as beautiful as they are chaste and wise, the women of Kinnaur enjoy full liberty, prestige and dignity in all family and social activities in Kinnaur. They mix and interact with their counterparts with unabashed innocence and frankness; and no man can dare abusing them in any manner. The crime against females rampant elsewhere in the country, is virtually unknown here. Because of these traits, they not only stand out from their male counterparts in all family and social activities, but they have also stood shoulder to shoulder in education with their male counterparts. Many of them are teachers, technocrats and doctors.

Within the family, the married women of Kinnaur command the respect and regard of all the male and younger female members. She is responsible for running the household and is respectfully addressed as *goine*, i.e., the mistress of the household. The eldest male member of the family is addressed as *gortes*, i.e., the master of the household, but his position is subject to the pleasure of *goine*. In fact, nothing can happen in the family without her consent. She is virtually the hub around which the household functions.

Despite her exalted position, the Kinnauri women are very hardy and laborious: all economic activities of the household – indoor or outdoor – are performed by them. Except for ploughing,

they perform all agrarian chores, and collect grass, fuelwood and also pasture the livestock. They even prepare *rakhi*, *chhang* and *arak* (home-made varieties of liquor) for their menfolk, but never drink. However, they may take a few drops of liquor on certain religious occasions as the customary ritual offering. There has been a tradition of preparing a special type of liquor, known as *shudung*, for religious ceremonies. The *shudung* is made from the lumps of sugarcane jaggery (*gur*), which the Kinnauras used to import from Rampur and other places in the down country in the earlier times, but now it is locally available in the village shops.

No social or community function is complete without the active participation of women. Group and community dancing and singing is an integral part of the Kinnauri lifestyle, and in all these performances, the women play leading role. Even in community or social service activities, the women outsmart their male counterpart. However, despite the high status of women in the Kinnauri family and social systems, those have been shown as dependent of the menfolk for their material needs by most of the writers on Kinnaur, which is not correct. Such comment can at best be explained as an outsider's superficial observation. Having very closely observed and experienced the Kinnauri family and social setup by living with many of them at different times, I can confidently say that although the *goine* enjoys the most powerful position in the Kinnauri family setup, yet the question who dominates whom is irrelevant in the harmonious and all-caring family atmosphere.

#### COSTUMES AND ORNAMENTS OF LOWER KINNAUR

The people of lower Kinnaur, especially the women, are very fond of adornment and ornaments. They make tufts and garlands, called *tekuma*, of not only thin *chamukao* petals, but also of dry fruits – *chilgoza*, walnuts, *chuli* nuts etc. The ornaments used by them are mostly of silver. These are made of die pressed or embossed leaf-thin silver sheets, cut into different forms. Instead of soldering, different elements of an ornament are linked together by loops, hooks and ringlets. Thus, most of the ornaments are full of dangling fringes, which even on the slight movement produce jingling

sound. While, there is a profusion of ornaments for head, ear and nose, there are fewer for neck, arms and hands, and nothing by way of foot ornament. However, under the prevailing socio-cultural ferment, the traditional dress manners are fast going out of vogue: these are being replaced by the jackets and jeans among the males and by the jackets, Punjabi *kamiz* and *salwar* among the females. The menfolk appear to be more enthusiastic for change to the 'modern' dress manners than the womenfolk. In the female costumes, the nostalgic traditional touch may still be found, and so are their traditional ornaments still vibrant with the nostalgic sheen and charm.

## Male Costumes and Ornaments

### Costumes

The men wear *teping* as head-dress. It is a round woollen cap, with a fronting lappet of velvet or *shenil*, usually of crimson colour. This is a well-known Kinnauri cap. However, of late the traditional Kinnauri cap has largely been replaced with the Bushahri cap, having parrot green lappet, because of political consideration: parrot green being the colour of Bushahr royal house. Incidentally, this colour distinction is little known to the new generation of people. The people adorn this cap with flowers, tucked in the fold. The people of Kinnaur wear a multi-coloured woollen muffler, called *gulmeta*. The *gulmeta* has richly embroidered designs on the ends.

The *kameez* or *kurti* or *chamu kameez* is a white cotton or woollen shirt, tailored locally by a *Chomang*. Over *kurti*, a *sadari* (also called *chamu kurti*) is worn. It is a sleeveless woollen jacket with pockets. The traditional over garment for the upper part has been a woollen long coat of the *ackkan* type, called *chhuba*. The *chhuba* is of two types. The plain one is worn as a matter of routine, but the one with piped edges is worn on the ceremonial occasions. A common type of woollen coat is also being used by the people in place of a *chhuba*.

The *chhuba* is held in position by a *pared sach* or *gachang*. It is a woollen or cotton sheet of narrow width, of about three metres in

length, wrapped multifold round the waist as a waistband. On the festive and ceremonial occasions, a silken waistband, called *burka*, is worn by the people.

Many times, the people put on the *takose nayanlukh* over the shoulders. It is a white woollen shawl, richly adorned with multi-coloured geometrical designs.

For the legs, *suthan* is worn. It is a woollen or cotton pyjama. On the ceremonial occasions, people wear *takose-suthan*. It is a tight woollen *churidar* (puckered) pyjama, made of the fabric having chequered design. The *chamu suthan* is a plain woollen pyjama.

*Takose chukh* is a pair of footwear with embroidered woollen upper. Unembroidered footwear is called *chukh*. The *gunspona* is ordinary footwear made of wool and goat hair. The sole is made of goatskin. Over the sole, the upper of the shoe is woven with the goat hair, with a border of black and white wool. Some *gunspona* are embroidered in multi-colour and those are called *tapru-se baldanuspona*.

### *Ornaments*

In Kinnaur, normally men do not wear ornaments. However, a few of them may wear *lakshap* – a silver or gold ring, but that practice may also be attributed to the external influence. In fact, there has been no such tradition among the people of Kinnaur or among their kin in the neighbouring districts. However, there has been the tradition of wearing a small earring, called *murki* among them. The old people may still be seen wearing one or more *murkis* in their ears. The use of *murki* has also been common among their kin – the Khash.

## **Female Costumes and Ornaments**

### *Costumes*

The women in Kinnaur wear *teping* or *thepang*, similar to the one worn by their mate counterparts. The head-dress of *namsha*, i.e., the bride, is the *kir kir thepang*. This cap is different from the common *thepang*.



Kinnauri girls in traditional costumes.

The *choli* is a full-sleeved blouse, worn as an upper garment. The *choli* having decorative work on it is called *sanjab se choli*. Below *choli*, the Kinnauri women wear *dohru* or *thuma*. It is a woollen garment, worn like *sari*, but with the difference that it is knotted on the back, where the embroidered border of *dohru* is shown out. Both ends of *dohru* are tied with *digara* (or *digra*) on the breast towards the left. The *dohru* that the brides wear is known as *takose-dohru*. The *takose-dohru* is embellished with colourful geometrical patterns. The women also put on shawls across their shoulders. That shawl is known as *chhanli*. Its both ends are held in position by *digaras*. The shawl used by the bride is more profusely ornamented. That shawl is known as *takose nayanlukh*.

The women also wear the same type of shoes as the men do.

### Ornaments

The women of lower Kinnaur have great penchant for ornaments. These ornaments are distinctive not only in design but in use as well. Mostly made of thin silver sheets, many of them are enriched with complex floral designs, meticulously handcrafted with simple

chisel and hammer. Thus, every piece that the *Domang* turns out is unique in form and design. However, stereotype die pressed ornaments are also common, but the handcrafted and traditional ones are preferred.

By way of head ornament, *tonal* or *tonang* is a silver chain with fringes. It is worn across the forehead. The *takpan shan glang* is a silver chain tied to the hair above the neck. The *chak* is a bowl-like hollow ornament, worn by the women in lower Kinnaur as a symbol of *suhag*, i.e., the state of being married. The *phiaeza* is a silver band worn on the forehead. The *zutti* is a heavy hair pendant or a type of *paranda*. It is made of several thin silver beads, leaves and semi-precious stones, conches, *rattis* (*Abrus precatorius*), etc., linked together.

For ears, the women use *kantai*, *khul kantai*, *garbit*, *zumkoo*, *mula-mentho* or *mool-u* and *shedu-shankali*. The *kantai* is like an earring of much larger size and weight, yet the women wear from six to eight pieces of *kantaies* on each ear without straining it. To do that, they fix the desired number of *kantaies* on a piece of fabric in a symmetrical order to make a *khul kantai*. That piece of fabric is then hooked to the hair in such a manner that the *kantaies* look fixed on the helix of ear. Sometimes, the women who have the helixes of their ears pierced, wear as many as eight pieces of *kantaies* in their ears in place of *khul kantaies* despite the risk of getting the ears deformed by the prolonged use of such a heavy ornament. The *garbit* is a silver ear ornament and the *zumkoo* is a pendant-like flower-shaped silver piece worn in the ear. The *mulamentho* or *mool-u* is a pair of ornaments hung from the hair down to the neck on both sides of the face, creating an illusion of an ear ornament. It comprises several bunches of silver leaves, dangling downwards and hooked to a large triangular plaque. To that plaque, an intricate fringe-like lattice work is attached. The *shedu-shankali* is a typical ear ornament, having a semi-globular top and a long chain, one end of which is tied to *tepan*g and the top is worn as an ear stud. From the top, dangle number of chains downwards, to which *kantaies* are hooked. At times, bunches of thin silver leaves are also attached to *kantaies*.

For the nose, there are *khundo* or *khundoch*, *balu*, *baluk* and *loug*. The *khundo* or *khundoch* is a pendant worn on the nostril. It is made



A Kinnauri belle adorned with traditional finery.

of gold. The *balu* is a gold nose-ring, similar to the one common elsewhere in the country. The *baluk* is an oblong nose-pendant, worn in the septum. The *loug* is a large filigreed gold stud, having red and blue stones fixed in the centre. The *loug* is worn on the right nostril, leaving the left one for the *balu*.

For neck, the Kinnauri women have many varieties, such as *shulig chu*, *kontthi*, *bizli* or *shokpotok*, *doroli* or *chanderseni har*, *koshmal*, *poshal*, *mulugawoo* or *shatungma*, *chandramalang*, *kachong*, *kanttha-malang* and *tri-mani*. The *shulig chu* is a necklace of coral beads and the *kontthi* is a necklace of coral, turquoise and silver beads arranged together. The *bizli* or *shokpotok* is a necklace with three gold beads in the middle. These beads are typical for their fine granular surface. The *doroli* or *chanderseni har* is a large necklace made of Victorian silver coins. Sometimes, coral beads are also inserted between the coins. The *koshmal* is a heavy necklace of large silver beads. The *poshal* is a necklace of amber beads, similar to the one worn by the Gaddins of Chamba. The *mulugawoo* or *shatungma* is an amulet case, made in many shapes and designs



in Kinnaur. Produced in square, pentagonal or hexagonal shapes, it is worn round the neck by males and females alike. It is made of copper or silver. Sometimes, silver cases are adorned with gold inlay work. The *chandramalang* is something like a *kontthi*, but it also has Victorian silver coins of different denomination, inserted between the coral and turquoise beads. Thus, the *chandramalang* can be defined as the combination of *kontthi* and *chanderseni har*. The *kachong* is a sort of choker made of silver. The *kanttha-malang* is a necklace made of silver beads of smaller size, interspaced by the gold beads of larger size. The *tri-mani* is a small necklace having assortment of silver beads and silver plaques, with three granular hollow beads in the middle. The silver beads used in *tri-mani* are smaller and solid.

For the wrist, there is *dhagloo*. It is a heavy bracelet commonly made in pairs. Two bracelets are joined together to make one. Rich women wear a pair of these double bracelets. Customarily, the unmarried girl may wear a single *dhagloo*, whereas the married one may wear double piece or the soldered pair. The *kagun* or *lakshap* is a silver or gold finger-ring, with the coral or turquoise stones fitted in it.

There are no ornaments for the lower part of body. However, by way of exception, I could find two rare ornaments for the lower part of the body in one of the traditional Kinnauri families. However, I saw none now wearing these ornaments. One of these, the *boringu shangling* is a silver chain worn round the waist and *pollari* is a flat silver ring for the toe.

Besides the above ornaments, there are variety of ornamental costume-fasteners in Kinnaur, such as *digara*, *digara chhu*, *tamuch* or *pechu*, etc. The *digara* is a decorated brooch, used by the women to fix the ends and loops of their *dohru*. This fixture is also used at several other places in the interiors of Himachal Pradesh. The *digara* is made of silver normally in the shape of a rhombus, treated with the artistic alto-relievo work. The *digara chhu* or *shangling* is a knitted chain of silver wires. Normally, it is a three fold, having a long silver pin on each end. *Tamuch* or *pechu*, also called *pichuk* or *bamnu* is used as a brooch. It is a stylized trefoil silver plaque, with beautiful alto-relievo work on its surface.

To conclude, it may be observed that the traditional dress

manners and ornaments of lower Kinnaur represent a blend of costumes and ornaments used by the people of neighbouring Shimla district and of upper Kinnaur. However, the influence of former is predominating.

### COSTUMES AND ORNAMENTS OF UPPER KINNAUR

The upper part of Kinnaur and the rest of trans-Himalayan highland cold desert is one of the unearthly places on the earth. The scorching heat and blinding glare under the sun, extreme cold during the nights and the sunless winters have created one of the harshest living conditions in the world. That condition has contributed to the development of distinct types of skin, fur and woollen clothing and profuse jewellery that covers almost entire face behind it. The jewellery is almost without exception made of leaf thin silver sheets, coral and turquoise beads and amber. Enamelling on the ornaments and studding of stones on them is generally not preferred and the people love to have silver ornaments 'neat'. The stones are used as beads to make independent items of adornment, like the headgears or necklaces, but using them as studs on silver pieces is not preferred. Nevertheless, there are numerous metallic portable objects that are embellished with colourful semi-precious stones, fixed on them. The people have a good variety of ornaments for upper part of the body, but the ornaments for the lower part are conspicuous by their absence. However, the traditional costumes and ornaments are being fast replaced by the outfits of the jean culture.

### Male Costumes and Ornaments

#### *Costumes*

The men normally wear a fur-lined high-domed cap, called *ling-zima*. The *ling-zima* has folded flaps that can be unfolded to cover ears and neck. To cover their bodies, the men wear loose long woollen frocks or long coats, called *rigoya*. The *rigoya* when made of sheep or goat skin is known as the *lhakpa*. Such garment made of cotton and lined with the fur of goat or sheep is known as *charlak*. The cap and the long coat are generally of maroon, red or

black colour. The well-to-do people also wear a cotton or silken under-coat, called *tochay*.

The coat is tied round the waist with a broad sash, known as *kira*. For legs, people wear tight woollen trousers, the *suthan*. They use heavy footwear with thick leather sole and the upper made of felt, which reaches well up to the knees. It is called *lham*.

Like the Gaddis of Chamba, the people of this trans-Himalayan cold desert region also carry in the *kira* (the roomy pockets) and the space created within the underside of coat an assortment of objects, such as a portable prayer wheel, *kulig* (bunch of keys), a metallic cup and spoon, a *dri* (knife), *gangzed* (a polished iron pipe), a bag of *sampa*, etc.

### *Ornaments*

In upper Kinnaur, as elsewhere in the trans-Himalayan region, the men are also fond of wearing ornaments. They wear *gaklong* (an ear-pendant) made of silver. In the *gaklong*, turquoise and amber are inset. A necklace, called *ultik*, made of turquoise, coral, amber and mother of pearl beads, is also worn by them. The menfolk also wear *ghiyee*, a silver pendant, as necklace. Normally, the turquoise and coral are also set in the *ghiyee*. Some people also wear silver bangle in the right arm. This bangle is known as the *doo*. A silver ring worn by the men is known as *surndup*.

## **Female Costumes and Ornaments**

### *Costumes*

The women in upper Kinnaur normally go about bare-headed, displaying their intricate hairdo, which involves number of thin plaits interwoven with yak's hair. These plaits hang down over their backs well below the waist, where these are gathered together and tied with the strings made of turquoise beads. However, during the cold weather conditions, the womenfolk wear a graceful round and high cylindrical cap with flat top. This fur-lined cap is known as *shamo*.

For their body, the women here use *hoojuk*. It is a collarless and

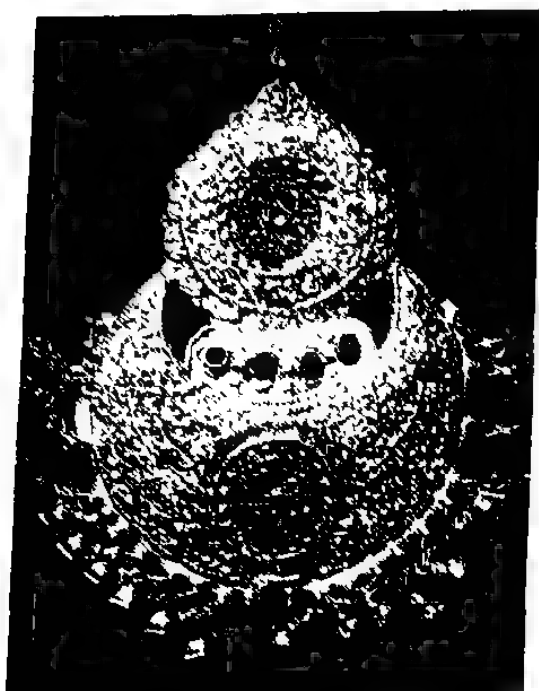
buttonless full-sleeved cotton shirt. They also wear a long frock-like cotton or corduroy garment, called *tochay*. This garment, when made of woollen fabric, is known as *rigoya*. The *rigoya* is generally adorned with colourful and golden piping and border. To keep this garment tightly in position, it is secured with a waistband, called *kira*. The *lingchay* is a woollen shawl that the women put on. Sometimes, they put on a fur-lined white woollen shawl, known as *lukpa*. Longer the hair on *lukpa*, the more valuable it is.

The women here wear all types of footwear available from the village shops or the outer markets, but the *lham*, heavy footwear having thick leather sole and felt-made upper that reaches unto the knees, is the popular footwear. The women here have been traditionally making footwear for their household use. For walking on the snow during the winters, the women have been making straw-shoes, called the *poolah*. These are made of the barley stalks and hemp fibres, twisted together into a thick cord and hand-knitted to make *poolah*. Sometimes, the twisted barley cord is knitted into a thick sole, to which an upper, made of hemp fibres, is stitched. This footwear is quite warm and secure for walking on the frozen hard snow, but it wears out too soon.

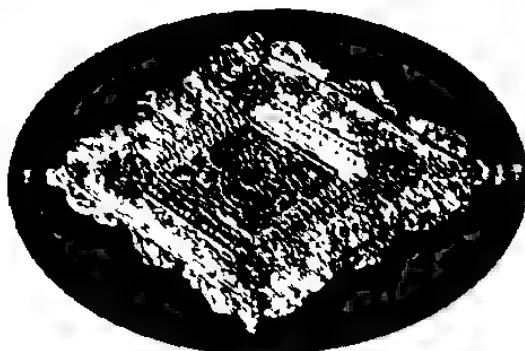
### Ornaments

The women of upper Kinnaur are very fond of ornamentation and adornment. They possess a great number of these, but possibly for the economic reason, gold and silver ornaments are minimal with them as compared to their counterparts in lower Kinnaur. However, that deficiency is well compensated by the profuse use of semi-precious stones – turquoise, coral, amber, sapphire, mother of pearl, etc.

The *bhavarak* is a typical head-ornament for the married women. It comprises a strip of padded cloth, generally red in colour. It hangs from the forehead on both sides of the face nearly halfway down and then carried backwards, where both ends are secured in the hair. The *bhavarak* is a richly-studded piece, with many semi-precious stones, including turquoises, sapphires, etc. fitted on it. Silver amulets and embossed plaques, depicting different devices, like sun, crescent moon, etc., are also fixed on it.



*Mool-u* - a head ornament.



*A digra.*



*A chak.*

The *berag* is another head-ornament for the married women. It consists of a large piece of felt or padded cloth, about three-fourth of a metre long and about a quarter metre wide. Its surface is profusely studded with turquoises, sapphires, glass beads, silver talismans, etc. The *berag* covers the skull and hangs as a protective flap over the braided hair on the back. It is fixed in position by small silver tubes and chains, tied round the head and to the ears.

However, the most fancy and graceful headgear of the women of upper Kinnaur is *perak*. Although, it is more an item of costume than an ornament, yet the elaborate treatment with which it is embellished entitles it to be an item of ornamentation. It is a turquoise-studded cobra-hood-shaped piece, with earflaps made of black yak wool. That hood not only covers the head, but it also trails off into a tail reaching the waist, and some times contains oblong locket of silver (rarely of gold). As the tradition goes, earlier the *perak* did not have earflaps. However, once a queen of Ladakh developed an ear disease, caused by the

chilly winds. She was advised to keep her ears warm by covering them with the lamb's skin. From that time on, the *perak* with the earflaps came to be made and used by the women by a royal decree.

The aforementioned ornaments – *bhavarak*, *berag*, and *perak* – are the preserve of married women only, unmarried girls are not allowed to wear these. However, an unmarried girl may wear a single turquoise piece on her forehead at the point of parting of hair. This piece is known as the *ghyool*.

The *chinkut* is a string made of small tinkling bells and beads. It is worn in the hair.

For the ears, the women here wear *kontas*. It is an earring with a small pendant attached to it. The *kontas* are mostly made of silver or brass.

There has been no tradition of wearing nose-ornament among the women of upper Kinnaur. It is extremely rare to find a woman wearing a nose-ornament. However, under the extraneous influence, young women may be seen wearing nose-stud now.

Among the ornaments of neck, the *ultik* is a multi-stringed necklace made of the beads of turquoise, coral, etc. A woman may wear number of *ultiks* of different types at a time. Some of the *ultiks* may also have heavy turquoise pieces or encrusted stones as the pendants. Such pendant-fitted necklace is known as *ghiyoo*.

The women also wear huge bracelets made of hollowed conch shells. These are called *dhunglak* or *tumalak*. A woman, while greeting a respectable person, would strike together her bracelets thrice to express her unspoken regards. The women also wear plain silver bangles, called *doo*.

By way of finger-ornaments, *surndup* is worn. It is a plain or studded silver finger-ring.

Although rarely, the women here may also be seen wearing *pichoon*, a typical waist ornament made of silver, and inlaid with semi-precious stones. However, this is more a costume ornament, used to keep the long woollen coat in position. The other costume ornament used by the women here is *dikra* (similar to *digara* of lower Kinnaur). It is a stylized safety pin used to fix and hold together the loose ends of a shawl. The outer surface of *dikra* is made of silver, at times inlaid with semi-precious stones. Some-

times, several strings of silver chain are also attached to *dikra*, which are gathered on the right side and hooked to *kira*, the waistband.

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# 7

## FESTIVALS

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Traditionally speaking, fair, as it is defined in the dictionaries as a periodic assemblage of buyers and sellers at an ordained place, is unknown in Kinnaur. However, it is the land of flowery festivals. After the adorable and charming women of Kinnaur, beautiful flowers come next. All hues of these grow abundantly in the wild meadows and the mountain slopes after the snow has melted. People religiously gather these flowers when these are getting wilted and dried from the *kandas* (high pasturing slopes) and distribute these among themselves. However, their love for dried flowers does not end there; they import *tats* (capsules of *Oroxylum indicum*) from the outer districts of Himachal Pradesh, where these are also known as the *Kinnauri phool*. The *tats* are split apart to take out the silky white flaky petals to make tufts and garlands, known as the *chamukoo* in lower Kinnaur and *tsamba-kha* in the upper part. The Kinnauras adorn their gods and also decorate their caps and garments with these. The womenfolk have particular fascination for these natural items of adornments.

Should one hear faint sound of musical instruments coming from the distant valley, that is a clear indication of a festival or religious function being celebrated somewhere. There are as many public festivals in Kinnaur as the number of days in a year.<sup>1</sup> Besides, there are more than ten cloistered monastic celebrations. Many of these festivals and celebrations last for more than a week. For instance, *Sawanang Sang-thang* (at Thangi) lasts for one month on alternate



nights, *Shujarh* festival (at Rupi) lasts for twenty days, *Suskar* festival lasts for 15 days, *Phagul* festival and *Gija* festival (at Poo) and *Namgan Chheya* festival (at Chango) continue for ten days each, *Gija* festival (at Namgia) lasts for nine days and *Phulaich* festival (at Kilba and Sapni) continues for eight days, to name a few. A visitor to Kinnaur may find in any season festival going on somewhere in the villages, but these are too numerous during the winter, when Kinnaur dons a thick mantle of snow and most of the outdoor activities come to a grinding halt. Some festivals are held simultaneously at many places, some others are celebrated in succession at different villages according to the traditionally sanctified order, and then there are the village-specific festivals. Besides numerous popular indigenous festivals, there are several traditional ones of the Buddhist and Brahmanical origin, and of late government organised 'fairs' have also come into vogue. The mirthful and fun-loving Kinnauras – males and females alike – participate in all of them very enthusiastically, dancing and singing in gay abandon for hours and hours together. The government organised 'fairs' are similar everywhere, with some occasional local touch, but the festivals of Buddhist and Brahmanical association, though broadly identical in nature, have distinct local quintessential fervour. However, the autochthonic festivals form a distinctive class by themselves. The folklore, beliefs, traditions and customs associated with them are some of the most authentic sources for the anthropological, sociological and historical study of Kinnaur and its people. Here, we shall be discussing some of the important indigenous festivals.

### **Phulaich: The Festival of Flowers**

Before we start talking about the 'festival of flowers,' there is one thing important to know about the Kinnauras: they have been the ardent lovers of nature. They never despoil it, but live with it in the reciprocative relationship and respect it. Customarily, a Kinnaura would never pluck a blooming flower, but use only naturally wilted and dry ones. Even for garlands, they never use flowers, but use local dry fruits – *chilgoza*, walnut kernel, *bemi*, etc. Even for their deities, they never offered flowers. It is only under the Brahmanical influence that this practice started with them. For



A social gathering on *Phulaich*.

their adornment, they use coloured woollen threads, tied to form tuft or bunched to look flower-like, and the silky white wafer-thin petals of *Oroxylum indicum* to make *chamukoo* or *tsamba-kha*, as it is called in lower and upper Kinnaur respectively.

Among the festivals of Kinnaur, *Phulaich*, 'festival of flowers', is the most important one. Starting from the 10<sup>th</sup> day of *Bhadrabad* (around August-September) at village Rupi, it continues at different villages in succession until the *Dushehra* festival, when the celebrations conclude at Kalpa-Kothi group of villages (locally known as *Sayrak*). Generally, this festival is known as *Phulaich*, but this does not appear to be its traditional Kinnauri name: may be a later generalised identity, which roughly conveys its traditional significance. The traditional Kinnauri name of this festival is *Ookhyang*, i.e., 'oo' (flowers) + 'khyang' (to behold) or 'beholding flowers'. It is also called *Ookhyam*, i.e., 'oo' + 'khyam' or the 'wilting of flowers.' It suggests that after *Phulaich*, the blooming flowers on the *kandas* start shrivelling. In fact, it is the season when the *kandas* and mountain slopes are abloom with numerous exotic varieties of flowers, like *dongar* (*brahm-kamal*, also called *zomar* or *rongar*) (yellow), *dramau* (white), *jevije* (yellow and green), *jolt* or *lolchi* (grey),  *khasbal* (white and black), *lhoskar*, *loskarch* or *roskarch* (green), *pao* (green), *poshu* (yellow), *shupating* (red), *spal* (green), *spetpinning-tingcho* (green), etc. This festival is also known by other local names, such as *Minthonko* at Kanam, Lippa and Labrang; *Namyang* at Hango, Leo; *Ukhing* at Sannam etc.

The *Phulaich* is essentially the festival of saying thanks with flowers. For that flowery thanksgiving, people gather particular flowers of different varieties from the high mountain slopes. Those flowers are offered to the manes and rambling forest and mountain spirits, popularly known as *Savaniya* (or *Sa-o-ni*). They are supposed to be sixteen in number, hence also known as the *Solha Savaniya*. Possibly under the extraneous influence, the *Savaniya* are also defined as the goddess Kali, as the following folksong states:

“Ookhyang thoo hachee, ookhyang Kali manayamo latish.”

Customarily, a day or two before the festival, a group formed of odd numbers of sturdy high caste men, is ceremoniously sent off from the village in the wee hours of morning to the high mountains. That group of volunteers is called *uchhang* or *ubanthya*. In some villages, as at Kanam, Labrang, etc., young women also accompany their male counterparts on that expedition. The *uchhang* carries a symbol of the village deity with them, besides a stock of food and liquor (called *rakh* or *phasura*).

On reaching the destination, the *uchhang* maintain complete silence lest the manes and mountain spirits should be disturbed. After performing some rituals and sprinkling liquor around, the group starts gathering flowers. It is customarily essential that the *dongar* flowers are gathered first, because as the tradition holds, it protects people from the evil spirits as it did in the legendary past, when it sheltered Indr against the demons. People keep dried flowers of *dongar* in their houses, and whenever a person dies, some petals of *dongar* are placed on the corpse lest some evil spirit should possess it.

Having gathered enough flowers, some flowers are offered to the manes and Kali with the prayer not to harass the villagers, and the rest packed in a woollen blanket. The *uchhang* then starts homewards, but care is taken not to look backwards during the first leg of descent, fearing that the devilish spirits may haunt them. After resting for a while, the *uchhang* resumes its journey, laughing, hooting and singing obscene songs to ward off the evil spirits that might be following them. On approaching the village, some of the *uchhang* members cut a long branch of a tree and decorate it with the flowers brought by them. The *uchhang*, escorted

by the villagers and the traditional musicians, then moves towards the *sang-thang* – the traditionally specified place away from village, where the finale of the *Phulaich* is celebrated.

On reaching *sang-thang*, an ablutionary ritual is performed to ensure that no devilish forest spirit (Kali) has accompanied the *uchhang*. The ritual of cleansing is followed by the sacrificial ceremony at *sang-thang*, which varies from village to village. According to a folksong associated with the *Phulaich* festival, in the primitive past, human sacrifice was performed on that occasion, but that was replaced by a bull sacrifice. However, later even bull was replaced by the goat sacrifice, and now even goat sacrifice is dispensed with, and only *prasad* serves the purpose. The rejoicing and singing continue for days. Each day of the celebration is known by a different specific name that varies from village to village and so does the form of ceremonies. The *grokch* – an oracle of village god, makes prophecies under the divine afflatus. The village folks, dressed in their traditional best, throng the *sang-thang*. People sing and dance to the tune of musical instruments. One of the popular songs implores flower buds thus:

"Haidamayan zado stang jas kee tare,  
Kanare oo khakao geethang"

That is,

Till *Phulaich* next, be there happiness and joy around,  
Flowers in the ears and songs on the tongue abound.

### Dakhraini Festival

The *Dakhraini* is another important indigenous festival of Kinnaur, in which flowers play significant role. Celebrated on the first day of *Shravan* (corresponding to July), this festival is usually a one day affair in most of the villages, but it is stretched to a couple of days more at village Pangi and other villages of mid-Kinnaur. The significant aspect of this festival is that no animal is sacrificed on this occasion, but only garlands of *dongar* and *lhoskar* are offered to the deity and butter, milk and whey are offered and consumed. Although, the method of celebrating this festival varies from village to village, yet the wild flowers of *dongar* and *lhoskar* are



A group dance on *Dakhraini*.

considered necessary for offering to the village deity. People gather these flowers from high ranges and prepare garlands to be offered to the deity and distributed among themselves.

At village Kothi, the temple of Chandika becomes the venue of celebrations. People gather in the temple courtyard and offer garlands to the goddess. They dance and sing for hours in the temple yard. This festival is also associated with the ancestor worship. One or two members of the family, where death has occurred prior to *Dakhraini* festival, go to the *kanda* to offer food and dry fruits to the shepherds in memory of the deceased. Under the influence of Himalayan Buddhism, a white flag, with the Buddhist mantras printed on it, is also planted for the peace of the departed soul.

Preparations for the three-day long *Dakhraini* festival start weeks earlier at village Pangi. Houses are cleaned and white-washed for the occasion, and the people put on washed or new clothes. On the first day of festival, people proceed in groups to high ranges of the nearby Piri mountain range and offer flowers at the *kotgach* – the stone piles erected in the memory of ancestors. These commemorative structures are also known as *kotang*, *shikhar*, *shakari*, *shakuree*, etc. People improvise a makeshift shelter for their night stay and spend that night in dancing and singing. The next

day early in the morning before dawn, people offer flowers, say prayers and plant red banners on the memorial piles for the relatives who died during the intervening year. The people from nearby villages also join them in dancing and singing that continues until evening, when the people start returning home. By the evening, the people are back to their village at Pangi. During the night, the village god *Shushirang* is ceremoniously taken out. Garlands of flowers brought from the mountaintop are offered to the deity, but offering of liquor is compulsory to keep the god in good humour. That sanctified liquor is also distributed among the votaries. People dance and sing throughout the night. The village deity *Shushirang* also joins them in the merriment. Next morning, *Shushirang* is ceremoniously taken inside the temple.

In Nichar area, *Dakhraini* is celebrated differently. People in that area prepare festive foods, comprising *chilte*, chutney, fried leaven bread stuffed with *chuli* kernel etc. They divide themselves in two parties, one defined as *Kimpalaya* and the other as *Rampalaya*, possibly one party representing the *pohals* (shepherds) and the other the non-*pohals*. To make the distinction between the contending parties, the men of *Rampalaya* wear garlands of *zaibizaloo* flowers around their necks. As the night falls, people light *gyokhties*, i.e., torchwood (mostly the splinters of pinewood are used for this purpose). The goddess is ceremoniously brought out and the contending parties make preparation for the mock combat. At midnight, the *Rampalaya* party comes down with the burning torches in their hands, whereas the *Kimpalaya* party waits for its arrival in the temple premises. The members of both the contending parties start flaunting the *gyokhties* around and over the heads of their opponents. People believe that the cracking and burning splinters in that mock battle do not harm anybody. That display continues for a couple of hours, but the dancing and singing continue even for the next day.

The *Dakhraini* is essentially an indigenous festival of the area, celebrated to pay homage to the manes and for the thanksgiving and appeasement of the forest and mountain spirits that terrorise the people, especially the shepherds on the high mountains passes and *kandas*. However, influences of Himalayan Buddhism and the Brahmanism have also crept in it in various manners.

### Suskar Festival

Celebrated in the month of *Phalgun* (corresponding to February-March) for pacifying the rambling forest and mountain spirits, symbolised by the all-comprehensive goddess Kali, the *Suskar* is a fortnight long festival. It is an important festival of *Sayrak* area, which comprises Kalpa, Kothi, Duni, Tellingi, Khwangi, Brelingi and Kashmir (Kosmay). According to the age-old tradition told to me by my friend T.C. Negi, on this occasion, the demonic forest spirits – the *Savaniya* (or *Sa-o-ni*) – are propitiated and the people take home branches of *shur* plant as the symbol of *Savaniya*.

A popular lore also associates this festival with the legendary victory of the goddess Chandika of Kothi village over the local *tthakur*. On this occasion, the fabled sword (known as *Khandaji*) of the goddess is ceremoniously taken out around the villages of Kalpa and Tellingi. The day, when the divine sword reaches Kalpa, is celebrated as *Chiney-kayang*, i.e., the traditional group dance of Chiney (the traditional name of Chini). The holy sword is taken to the place where a huge rock lies near the Vishnu temple. As the tradition goes, goddess Chandika concealed her sword under that



A male dancer performing as female (*rao-la-ney*) to perform *to-shin* to appease goddess *Sa-o-ni*.

rock from the soldiers of *tthakur*. The village women bring their newborns to seek blessing of the goddess. The sword is taken back to the temple of Chandika at Kothi. That marks the beginning of *Suskar* festival at Kalpa that continues for five days with rejoicing, singing and dancing. The interesting part of dancing on this occasion is that two to four women of each community jointly perform a typical dance, called *to-shim*, i.e., to sit. They pick out two or three men for dancing. Those chosen male dancers perform as male and female dancers.



Male dancers (called *rao-la*) with covered faces performing *to-shin* to appease goddess *Sa-o-ni*.

The men who dance in the female dress are known as the *rao-la-ney* and the ones dancing in the male attire are called the *rao-la*. People believe that this dance performance appeases the forest spirits – the *Sa-o-ni*.

Although, the *Suskar* festival lasts for five days at Kalpa, yet it continues for fifteen days elsewhere in the *Sayrak* area. Each day of the *Suskar* fortnight is known by a separate name and is distinguished by a specific customary function.

Thus, the first day is known as *Chhatkernik*. On this day people bring home clay from the specified sites.

On the second day, known as *Chhallim*, clay is mixed with the cow-dung to form mortar. The walls and floors are also plastered on that day.

The third day, called *Rulphanting*, food, comprising rice and pulses, is cooked and given to the people of menial communities under the customary symbiotic inter-community dealing.

The fourth day, called *Martelang*, is marked by feasting. On this day, people prepare *chilte*, rice and pulses and eat it with ghee. This food is also distributed among the people of the menial communities on the following day.



On the fifth day, known as *Tipruchim*, a *Domang* from the temple of Chandika at village Kothi goes to village Kashmir (Kosmay) to disrupt the flow of water in the channel to village Kothi. That action symbolically declares that all routine activities, including working on the watermills and looms, spinning, working on wood and constructions work should be stopped and preparation be made to greet and propitiate goddess Kali. People smear their hearths with cow-dung solution to cook festive food that includes green leaves, *ogla* (*Fagopyrum esculentum*), etc. Everybody takes bath on this occasion, but the head of family must take bath in the village *bowli* (water spring), and after having done so, must not touch anybody or utter a word until he performs customary sacrament to propitiate Kimshu, the family deity, and the fierce goddess Kali. For that purpose, he places a goblet filled with spring water, offers flowers of *sanarang*, liquor, butter and festive food to the deity, lights a lamp and burns incense.

The sixth day, known as *Telekayang*, is a long day. On this day, a particular man (called *Tokanya*) of menial caste of village Brelingi is deputed on behalf of goddess Chandika to the *Chiney-gorang* (Kalpa Fort). The *Chiney-gorang* was also destroyed in the fire in December 1959. Now a newly-built school building stands on that site. Nevertheless, the locals occasionally visit this site to pay homage to the tradition. He stays there as a guest of the *Narain* of Kalpa. He visits the traditional family of *Chiney-charus* to get the ceremonial clothes for the *Krosya*, the traditional keeper of the holy sword (*Khandaji*) of the goddess Chandika. Customarily, the *Chiney-charus* refuses twice to oblige the *Tokanya*, but offers the clothes when asked the third time. Having received the clothes, he comes to the Kalpa Fort, where he is given liquor, butter, *doo* (a special pudding of *ogla*).

Thereafter, the *Tokanya* is identified as the *Dauloo* and, it is believed that the goddess Kali has possessed him. People avoid confronting him lest the devilish gaze of Kali befalls them. Should his gaze fall on any one, the victim has to seek expiation by offering a bottle of liquor, flowers and some money to the *Khandaji*. Nevertheless, a few men of Kalpa follow him with liquor and butter at a safe distance until he reaches the *Krosya* house (known as *Tholing*). The *Krosya* puts on the clothes brought to him by the

*Dauloo* and proceeds to the temple of Chandika to bring out the holy sword (*Khandaji*) from the *Shirkoth* (vault of the temple), wrapped in five silken sheets. On this day, an earthen pot (called *htrich*), filled with some water sweetened with *gur* is placed in the temple. Each day some sweetened water (called *shuthung*) is added to it until the tenth day, i.e., *Shukhubshimig* day.

A tradition associated with the holy sword tells that *Khandaji* was once a companion of Chandika. He descended from the Mount Kailash and killed the demon with a sword. That legendary sword came to represent him. After some rituals, the *Dauloo* and *Krosya* together take out the *Khandaji* and carry it ceremoniously to village Tellingi, accompanied by a group of people (known as *Kaliyan*). After propitiation and celebration at Tellingi, the *Khandaji* is brought back to *Tholing* as the night falls.

The seventh day, known as *Shumrapa*, is of rejoicing. The *Khandaji* is taken out to the fort at village Kashmir (Kosmay) for being propitiated with the fried leaven bread, liquor, butter and pudding. People drink, dance and sing in the uninhibited gusto.

The eighth day is known as *Chiney-kayang*. The term '*Chiney-kayang*' literally means the group dance of Chiney (village Chini). On this day, the *Kaliyan* group, escorting the *Khandaji*, arrives at Kalpa. The *Khandaji* is placed on the freshly-dug earth for a while, after which the *Kaliyan* enters the fort (now only the site remains), where the *Kaliyan* is fed on behalf of the *Narain* of Kalpa after some purificatory rites. The *Khandaji* is then taken to *sang-thang* (traditionally specified place for celebration), where people celebrate the occasion with liquor, dance and songs. On the same evening, the *Khandaji* is taken back.

The ninth day is known as *Kharwanakayang*. On this day, the *Khandaji*, escorted by the *Kaliyan*, visits the village of Khwangi. A tradition tells that once a woman of Tellingi, who was married in Khwangi village, happened to meet the *Kaliyan* party, while she was on her way to Khwangi. She requested the *Kaliyan* to visit her house at village Tellingi instead of going to Khwangi. The escort party agreed to her request. The party was served whey and *sattu*. From that day onwards, the *Kaliyan* party visits Tellingi, where it is served with whey and *sattu*. The same evening *Khandaji* is brought back to *Tholing*.

On the tenth day, known as *Shukhubshimig*, the *Khandaji* is ceremoniously deposited in the *Shirkoth* (the vault) of the temple of Chandika Devi. People drink, dance and sing in the temple courtyard. The celebrations continue for hours. After the celebrations are over, the *Krosya* returns the ceremonial clothes to *Chiney-charus*.

On the eleventh day, known as *Shubim*, the furious goddess Kali, who had arrived on the fifth day (*Tipruchim*), is given send off. People cook *poley* (*poltu*) and *koni* (*kangni*) rice.

The twelfth day is known as *Shungshonga*. On that day the earthen pot filled with sweetened water (called *shuthung*) from the *Telekayang* (sixth day) to *Shukhubshimig* (tenth day) is taken out of the temple. The *shuthung* is distributed among the people as the holy water. Women are not permitted to take the *shuthung*. Customarily, with the distribution of *shuthung*, the cultic rituals of the *Suskar* are considered consummated.

The conclusion of *Suskar* festival starts from the thirteenth day. There is no specific name for this day and the other two remaining days of celebrations. On this day, people indulge in merriment. The children enjoy water sports on this day. They tie a sturdy rope across the water tank and cross the water-body by clinging to it. The *swangs* and other pantomime performances are held. Some men, dressed in the female clothes, dance in gay abandon.

The fourteenth day is customarily the concluding day of *Suskar* festival, if it falls on Tuesday or Saturday, otherwise the festival has to be extended to meet that customary mandate. People prepare *koni* rice, *poltus*, etc. Liquor is consumed liberally. To mark the conclusion, the *Krosya* climbs to the rooftop of *Tholing*, where he performs the parting ritual by offering incense and liquor to Kali so that she may not harass people, but remain in peace in her abode in forests and *kandas*. Everybody is served food at the *Tholing*, but the oracle of Chandika is customarily forbidden to eat at the *Tholing*. Goddess Chandika is brought out. The village folks drink, dance and sing in wild gusto, believing that more they indulge in merriment, happier and bounteous the terrific goddess Kali will be.

The *Suskar* festival is celebrated in a different manner in upper Kinnaur. For instance, at village Rush Kalang on the border with Spiti, the *Suskar* festival starts after the *Fag* on the fourth day of

the bright half of *Phalgun* (corresponding to February-March). On that day, clay and cow-dung are made into mortar. Next day, the houses are plastered with the prepared mortar and whitewashed. The third day is utilised in cleaning the vessels. On that day, ritual propitiation of the manes and forest and mountain spirits is performed on the rooftop in the evening. Liquor, fried leaven bread, etc. are offered to them. Similar propitiatory rituals are performed on the following day. Then, there is a break of four days.

On the eighth day, propitiatory rituals start again during the mid-day on the rooftops. In the evening on the same day, people gather in the village square for fun and frolic. They drink, dance and sing through late night. The same routine – propitiatory rituals and bacchanalian revelry – continue for the ninth day. People believe that by doing so, the devilish spirits are mollified. The village gods also join their votaries in that pacificatory exercise. On the tenth day, people come out wearing dreadful masks and flaunting weapons. They dance zestfully to the beat of drums and other musical instruments for hours and hours together.

The folksongs sung during the *Suskar* festival at Rush Kalang record the historical events of Ladakhi invasion of Kinnaur.

### Phagul Festival

The *Phagul* is the most important festival of the rugged Athara-beesh *pargana* of lower Kinnaur. Normally this festival is celebrated in the month of *Phalgun* (corresponding to February-March), but the exact date of this festival is declared by the goddess *Ukha* (Usha), the presiding goddess of Nichar area, through her *gрокch* (oracle). With certain local variations, *Phagul* is functionally more or less similar to the *Suskar* festival. The *Phagul* festival is a 10-days event, each day being earmarked for a specific event.

On the first day, houses are cleaned. This day is known as *Chupengmig*.

The second day, known as *Chalkim*, is earmarked for plastering walls and smearing floors with mortar, prepared by mixing cow-dung and clay. Cow-dung acts as binding material in the mortar. It is necessary that clay for plastering and smearing is collected only on Sunday or Thursday of the bright half.

The third day is known as *Pub-stonmo*. On this day, people gather fuel wood, *iyokhties*, i.e., torchwood and stock food item for the next seven days for doing household chores, except the one related with the celebration of *Phagul* that are customarily prohibited. Accordingly, no wood can be cut, no grinding of grains and other work that creates noise can be done lest the spirits are offended. The fried leaven bread stuffed with kernels of wild apricots is prepared. A part of it is placed in an earthen pot, called *tetech* or *heed*. That pot is ritually installed on a corner of room. On each following day of the festival, the *tetech* is propitiated and the food put in it.

On the fourth day, called *Paza*, a he-goat is sacrificed to *Saunew* (*Savaniya*) – the forest spirits, on behalf of Goddess *Ukha*. The thanksgiving feast of rice and meat is arranged by the goddess in the temple premises.

The fifth day, known as *Polllunmo*, is the fateful day of the festival. The apprehensive village folks observe complete silence. Any unwarranted noise is considered forbidding. People cook *poltus* on this day.

The sixth day is called *Hutphal*. On this day, the flowers of *bhugangoo* are placed on the *tetech* and a *chilta* is put around its neck. In the evening, a person from every household takes the *tetech* out of his house and throws to break it at the village square or some common public place. Thereafter, a lamp is lighted in front of the entrance door.

The seventh day is known as *Basing*. This term is derived from the word *baisis* that literary means a conciliator. The customary institution of conciliator has been important to settle matrimonial alliances. Traditionally, only a man of integrity, honesty and confidence could act as the *baisis*. Because of his important position in the village society, a day is earmarked for him in the events of *Phagul* festivities. On this day, the *baisis* entertains with food those married women, for whom he acted as conciliator.

On the evening of eighth day, known as *Tedyoring*, people gather in large room of the temple of *Ukha*, and dance and sing. The programme of dancing and singing continues to the last day, when the *Phagul* festivities come to an end.

### Lamat Festival of Kanam

Starting from the fifth day of the bright half in the month of *Phalgun* (corresponding to February-March) at Kanam, Lamat is a festival of observing personal and social hygiene. This festival is dedicated to *Lamasha-Api* goddess, who, as the tradition holds, visits the village from Kliksorang Lake on the snowy heights near Sholding in Nichar area. This all-bountiful goddess, it is believed, prefers to enter the house that has been made clean and tidy for her stay. Therefore, people wash and clean themselves and clean their houses. They smear the houses with the solution of cow-dung and cow's urine. The central fireplace, where most of cooking is done on the *meling* (an iron tripod), is meticulously coated with cow-dung solution made in the urine of a cow.

People prepare small *chiltas*. Those *chiltas* and some butter are placed in a plate. The head of family carries that plate to the rooftop of house, holding in one of his hands a small faggot of smouldering local bush, called *shurku*. On the rooftop, he offers the food and incense of *shurku* to the spirits. That routine continues daily for the next seven days. Relatives are invited and fed with the festive food, comprising pulses and wheat flour *chapaties*, during the festival that continues for about a week.

On the last day of *Lamat*, the *grokch* (an oracle) of the goddess *Lamasha-Api* goes into trance and comments on the cleanliness of the villagers and their houses. Those found wanting, are admonished.

### Losar Festival

The term *losar* in the local dialect means 'new year': 'lo' = year and 'sar' = new. Obviously, *Losar* is the festival of New Year. There is no definite date for the celebration of *Losar*. It can be held any day between the first and twenty-fifth day of *Paush* (corresponding to December-January). The village elders themselves decide the date of celebration, but normally any day of the bright half in the month of *Paush* is selected for that celebration depending upon the local factors. Thus, the date of celebration of *Losar* varies from village to village. This festival of great antiquity is one of the most important

festivals of upper Kinnaur and rest of the trans-Himalayan region and Tibet, where the Kirat population (Sino-Tibetan speaking people of the Mongolian stock) predominates. Interestingly, a child born even a day before *Losar*, is considered one year old after that day. Similar custom exists in Bhutan.

The Tibetans celebrate their New Year festival in February with the rise of new moon. How then the date of celebration of this festival two months in advance is decided in an arbitrary manner in Kinnaur, is a question that needs to be resolved. Incidentally, the same practice exists in Ladakh, Lahul & Spiti. Obviously, deviation from the age-old practice by preponing of date should have some very compelling reason.

We learn from the history of Ladakh that during the reign of one of its *gyelpo*, Jamyang Namgyel (*Hjam-dbyans rNam-rgyal*) (CE c. 1560-1590), the kingdom had to pass through severe political crises, with all its vassals rising in defiance. Taking advantage of that situation, Ali Sher Khan of Skardu annexed part of Ladakh territory and garrisoned Bodh Kharbo. Certain rebellious feudatories of Ladakh also joined him.

To regain the lost territory from the invader and chastise the people of Chiktan for treason, the *gyelpo* Jamyang Namgyel mustered his troops and resources on war footing. However, his ministers advised him to defer the action until *Losar* festival, which was due about two months later, but the *gyelpo* was too impatient to wait for two months. Therefore, it was proposed that since the *gyelpo* could not wait too long, let the *Losar* festival be celebrated two months in advance. Accordingly, the *Losar* festival was celebrated on the first day of the eleventh month instead of the first day of the first month of the Tibetan calendar in the following year.<sup>2</sup> Thenceforward, the *Losar* festival came to be celebrated two months before the traditional *Losar* (the New Year Day). Because, that was a political decision, having no religious affirmation or traditional sanctity, the people chose to celebrate it arbitrarily depending upon the local conditions, but within the prescribed fortnight.

Since, Lahul & Spiti and Kinnaur remained under the control of Ladakh for considerable period, as already noted, the *Losar* festival came to be celebrated according to the royal edict in these

areas. That practice has now come to stay as a tradition.

A few days before the *Losar* festival, people clean and whitewash their houses. It is essential that every member of the family gets up from his or her bed before dawn on that day. Auspicious pictograms of ornaments, pitchers, trees, ass, lamb, etc. may also be painted on the walls so that one may see these soon after waking up on the *Losar* day. At many places, a grown up lamb is brought out from the *khud* (the enclosure where goats and sheep are kept) and make it stand on the front door so that everybody in the family may have the first sight of it. The first sight of a person of lower caste or dog is regarded ominous. Elsewhere, *bitralu* (a ram, which have been well-fed and kept tethered in the *khud* for months so that it becomes very fat) is slaughtered on that occasion. Elsewhere in Himachal Pradesh, *bitralu* is known as *khadu* or *rubh*. Its head is broken and cooked specially on that day. Fried leaven bread and other meals are also cooked. According to a custom, the *lambardar* (the headman) at village Chango in upper Kinnaur fires a gun in the air before the dawn on the *Losar* day signalling the arrival of New Year. Thereafter, people have a little curd, whey, buttermilk or simply water. Only then, the festive food prepared the previous night can be taken.



A *dhure* leading a dance number.



Early in the morning, people visit their relatives, carrying bottle of liquor and fried leaven bread. The guests are warmly received and feasted. Customarily, one has to bow before the central fireplace (where most of cooking is done on the *meling*) and then before all the present and to say *lo-soma-tashi* (Happy New Year). After exchanging greetings, the festive food is served. It generally comprises liquor and meat for the males and bread and meat for the females.

Thus, the whole day is spent in visiting relatives and rejoicing. In the evening, people get together for dancing and singing; of course, the liquor is always there. The merrymaking continues for couple of days more. Incidentally, the monastery or lama has no role in the celebration.

However, at the monastic village Kanam, situated in mid-Kinnaur, the autochthonic traditions and the lamaistic rituals go side by side. A day before the festival, *chiltas* and *khuras* are prepared. Early in the morning, when others in the family are fast asleep, the headman of family prepares the *brayangs* – a four-cornered ball made of *sattu*. Some butter is placed on it. A bottle of liquor and some dry fruits are placed before the *brayangs* and a lamp lighted. The sight of *brayangs* first in the morning on the eve of *Losar* is considered auspicious. In some villages, as at Moorang, Kimsu (the family god) is also placed beside the *brayangs*.

Early in the morning, the lamas prepare a new *darchhod* (a cotton banner, on which sacred charms and mantras are block-printed). That is then ceremoniously planted at the Labrang temple by two men. Later, offerings of the *brayangs* and a bottle of liquor is placed beside the *darchhod*. People also hoist *darchhod* on their houses and place *brayangs* and a bottle of liquor beside it. The family-headmen offer sanctified liquor among the family members. While doing so, they say *lo-soma-tashi* to everybody, which is reciprocated by all the family members. All these rituals are complete before the dawn.

During the day, people visit each others houses and exchange greetings and garlands of dry fruits. About the noon, people of menial community visit their patrons, who entertain them with liquor. People gather in the open ground, where traditional sports, like horse race, are organised. After the race is over, people visit

the Labrang temple to witness the discussion on the religious text between the two lamas. It is believed that listening to such discussions brings happiness and prosperity to the villagers during the year.

By the afternoon, the people gather in an open field for singing and dancing. Men and women form a long chain, with the *dhure* (the expert dancer who leads) holding a *chauri* (a yak-tail flywhisk) at the head. The dance continues through the night, if weather permits.

On the third day, during the night, in another temple, *Khache Lha-khang*, the lamas and *jomos* perform a dance, in which villagers also join. The dance may continue for the fourth day as well, if the people make a customary offering of some money and a bottle of liquor to the lamas.

### References

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# 8

## FOLK ARTS

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Kinnaur is undoubtedly one of the richest areas of the Himalayan region in the oral or unwritten traditions, which in the modern parlance may be defined as orature, i.e., oral literature, as opposed to the written one. In the folklore of this region, the most primitive belief-systems of the Himalayan indigenes centered on the terrifying forest and mountain spirits, the legendary lore of classical ages and the rudimentary traces of the history of medieval times may all be found blended together. Various traditions of the Himalayan Buddhism and Brahmanism of the mainland have further enriched the folklore of this area. Thus, an enormous plethora of traditional knowledge-system has come down to us in the folklore of this region. It may be broadly defined in two broad genres – the sung and prose traditions. These categories may further be divided into many subdivisions, but the most convenient of those are the folk-songs and folktales. Therefore, we have defined all those subdivisions under theses omnibus identities.

### FOLKSONG

Folksongs of Kinnaur are the honest and unabashed expression of feelings of the hardy people and their nature-based lifestyle. No aspect of the folk life, from cradle to grave and from hearth to field and forest has escaped mention in these folksongs. The people here have to labour very hard even to eke out frugal living against

numerous physical constraints. Therefore, whenever they find time from the arduous routine, they abandon themselves to fun, frolic, dancing and merrymaking, and none of these are complete without folksongs. The role of folksong does not end at that only: there are the auspicious songs sung at the time of birth and there are others, sung to mourn death, and in between these two ends, there are songs for religious and ceremonial occasions and the ones deeply steeped in emotive feelings. Then, there are popular ballads inspired by various epical and historical episodes. In fact, the community life in Kinnaur is incomplete without folksongs: while the air, water and food support life, the folksongs here sustain spirit.

However, to cap them all, the this-worldly bias of the folk psyche has infused in the people here a subtle feeling of companionship with their surroundings despite all arbitrariness of nature piled against them. That situation has instilled in them a mixed feeling of wonder and awe about the physical entities around them. Under that situation, the Kinnauri folksongs are deeply committed to the appeasement, propitiation and veneration of the demonic gods and goddesses and the belligerent forest and mountain spirits. These are as subtle, simple and free from any type of complexity or pretensions as are the people here, but are the eloquent and honest expressions of their feelings and aspirations, their hopes and despair, ecstasy and agony.

Interestingly, the inhospitable mountainous physiography of this region has been considerably responsible to shape the matrix of melodic structure of Kinnauri folksongs. It may appear that the nature has judiciously compensated the people for the physical severities by bestowing them with the melodious voice that has been eulogised as the *Kinnar-kantth*, i.e., the melodious voice of *Kinnars* in the classical Sanskrit literature. Interestingly, as the means of living get harsher towards upper Kinnaur, the pitch in singing gradually increases and it becomes very sharp in upper Kinnaur and the neighbouring Spiti. The musical compositions of the folksongs here are subtle and simple, but poignant with the melodious ingredients. These are free from vocal undulation and musical ornamentation. Ordinarily, the musical compositions of folksongs of this region are restricted to the first four notes of the

octave, and most of these are composed on the pure musical notes only. Thus, one may find a tang of gloom, a dolorous refrain, in most of these songs.

### **Musical Instruments**

Unlike other places in its neighbourhood, the musical instruments are the compulsory complement to the folksongs in Kinnaur, especially in lower Kinnaur. In the Buddhist upper Kinnaur and the adjoining Spiti and Ladakh, there are a few musical instruments that accompany the songs, but those exotic instruments are considered indispensable for the mystico-ritualistic monastic sacraments for attracting benevolent and dispelling malevolent spirits. Most of these are of the Tibetan origin, possibly belonging to the primitive Bon traditions.

Not only are these of the varied types, forms and origin, but some of these are of exotic nature. Nevertheless, their application has been varied and essential in the folksongs. However, the much publicised legendary *kinnari-veena* associated with Kinnaur is a misnomer: no stringed instrument of any type is known to exist among the traditional musical instruments of Kinnaur. However, the stringed instrument made of three gourds, played by the wandering community of Kinnari Jogi, who earn their livelihood by singing their version of the *Ramayan* and *Mahabharat* in Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan, may be the *kinnari-veena* of the mythical *Kinnars*. Mostly, the musical instruments, especially the expensive metallic ones, are owned by the temples and monasteries. For the private and social occasions, the musical instruments may be borrowed from the temple or monastery. However, the hereditary musicians (the *bajantris*) also possess some of the commonly used instruments for the sundry non-religious uses.

Among the wide array of traditional musical instruments of Kinnaur, the chordophonic (stringed) instruments are rare. However, there is a wide range of the exotic tone-based aerophonic (metal-wind and wood-wind) instruments, besides there are the rhythm-based membranophonic (percussion) and idiophonic (struck) instruments.

### *Chordophonic Instruments*

The stringed instruments are uncommon in Kinnaur. However, by way of exception, we learn about one stringed instrument, the *dutaro*. This instrument might have been used by the musicians earlier, but now it seems to be rare. The *dutaro* is something like the north Indian stringed instrument *israj*, having two stretched wires that are struck with nails. The only living player of this instrument in Kinnaur is Hiradas of village Thangi (Moorang). Although, the instrument that he plays is a *dutaro*, yet it has erroneously been publicised as the *kinnari-veena* by many writers and media persons.

### *Aerophonic Instruments*

Among the aerophonic (metal-wind and wood-wind) instruments, the *zumara* (*bashing*) is a wooden (or metallic) flute. The *ranshing* is a 'S'-shaped telescopic trumpet, made of copper, brass or silver. The *kanal* is a telescopic trumpet with a wider flared bell. It can be of copper, brass or silver. The *shanal* is a wooden *shehnai*, i.e., a type of clarinet. The *bukharyaing* is a two-metre long telescopic trumpet of copper with a small flared bell that releases a heavy and deep dolorous sound. It is known as *ragdun* in upper Kinnaur and *kohva* in mid-Himachal Pradesh. The *shankh* (a conch) is also known as *dung* or *tung*.

Among the aforementioned aerophonic instruments, the *zumara*, *ranshing*, *kanal* and *shanal* are the common musical instruments of great antiquity. Besides these, there are many magico-ritualistic musical instruments, which are played only by the lamas on the festive occasions in the monasteries. However, the lamas also play them in the private houses or outdoor for some specific magico-ritualistic dispensations for their patrons. Among these, the *kangling* is a clarinet-like instrument made of human thighbone. At times, it is encrusted with the chased copper, silver or gold sheets. This musical instrument, when made of thighbone of the woman who died in pregnancy or of the woman of noble birth is regarded very efficacious for arousing benevolent spirits. The *gailing* is similar to *kangling*, but it is made of wood or metal. The *stagdum* is also similar to *kangling*, but it is made of the thighbone of a leopard.

*Membranophonic Instruments*

There is a wide range of membranophonic (percussion) instruments in Kinnaur. Among these, the *bam* or *zigin* is a large kettledrum; *tun-punu* or *chikit bam* is a small kettledrum. The *naggara* is a large cylindrical drum. The *dhole* is an ordinary cylindrical drum. The *ddhaku* or *ddhakru* is a small kettledrum with double drumhead. The *nashuk* or *damaru* is a flat rattle drum and the *shonga* is a large and flat drum. All these membranophonic instruments produce booming sound on striking with sticks. Besides, *juzjang* is a small metallic rattle-drum that the lamas use in the temples.

*Idiophonic Instruments*

The idiophonic (struck) instruments are largely used on religious occasions, like performing religious sacrament in the temple or monastery or when the deity is being taken out in a procession, etc. On non-religious occasions, these are rarely used, with the exception of *bam*, *bani* or *chandraban*. It is a bronze plate-bell that, when struck with a stick, produces a sharp sonorous sound. Besides it, *gayane* is a small pair of cymbals, made of brass or bronze, which produces a low pitch metallic sound. In upper Kinnaur, it is known as *sinen*. The *bugzail* is a pair of large cymbals, made of brass or bronze, which produces a lingering sonorous metallic sound of very high pitch. It is called *rolmo* in upper Kinnaur. The *gunthung* is a small bell. It is known as *dil-bu* (*drill-bu*) in upper Kinnaur. When nothing is available to accompany the singing or dancing, people find *pipa*, an empty tin canister, handy for the purpose.<sup>1</sup>

The professional players of the traditional musical instruments are known as the *bajantri* in Kinnaur. In lower Kinnaur the hereditary *bajantris* come from the Domang castes. They not only play on the musical instruments, but manufacture them as well, for they are the professional smiths, specialising in iron, silver and gold work. However, in the casteless society of upper Kinnaur, the *bajantris* form an independent professional guild. They may or may not be the manufacturers of musical instruments. In both cases, *bajantri* is not a full-time occupation, but an occasional supple-

mentary job. Most of them live by agriculture, weaving and smithy. In any case, instruments are the indispensable accompaniment for the songs in Kinnaur, unlike other places in its neighbourhood, and therefore, the *bajantris* form a very vital part of Kinnauri social system. These *bajantris* are customarily attached to the village temples and monasteries; and it is obligatory for them to be available for the service of these establishments during the festivals. In return for the service rendered by them, they are compensated by giving them the stipulated quantity of foodgrains on every harvest. In some cases, even rent-free land has been granted by the temples to them.

The thematic sweep of the folksongs of this region is very vast and varied. One thing peculiar to the folksong of Kinnaur is that all of these are accompanied with the dances. Here, neither a song can be sung without a dance nor a dance can be performed without a song; both are complementary to each other, and essentially these are the group performances. Under this imperative, all Kinnauri folksongs are rhythm-based: the lyrical aspect of these songs generally remains secondary. Therefore, all these are befitting for any type of dance performance. Thus, one may find even a doleful song being sung with dance on auspicious occasions and vice versa. For instance, on the *chhantayamo* (occasions of death), the starting song, known as *chhantayamic geethang*, is in dolorous mood, but thereafter any song that complements the dance can be sung. Here is one example of the *chhantayamic geethang*:

*Roncho toiyan, kholge duvare.*  
*Roncho toiyan, pa shing pa raga.*  
*Roncho toiyan gora gorashira.*  
*Daeen tha gine jhonrazaoo chittthee.*  
*Kitha chakaraeen ang denachee jeskeeya.*  
*Ye beetedo phane zolang maya.*  
*Phane jug era shoo kirapenamya.*  
*Kitha chalaraeen ang den kee keskee.*  
*Phirane shure khane goinga.*

That is:



Gates and doors are listening.  
 Four wooden logs and four stones are listening.  
 Entire house is listening.  
 Brook no more the missive of death.  
 Think not, it happened to me.  
 It has been happening eons before.  
 When hundreds of gods were born.  
 Think not, it happened to me.  
 Henceforth, drive this devil away.

Nevertheless, there are some dance-specific songs too. For instance, in upper Kinnaur, *gyang-loo geethang* can only be sung with the *gyang-loo kayang*. Similarly, *thar geethang* can only be sung with the *thar kayang*. It happens that during winter, when the entire area is covered under a thick mantle of snow, the leopards occasionally hunt for the sheep and goats in the villages. When the villagers kill a predator, they celebrate a victory dance. That song-dance performance is known as *borcho natee*: the term *borcho* means a spear and *natee*, a group dance. Here is one very popular *thar geethang*:

*Singh raza loto bhai ta, Ad sidonee ham neen bhai.*  
*Ich batang ring toak bhai, Gata kanaoring bitoak bhai.*  
*Bayang gachoo sha zammoo bhai, Bayang karusha zamoo bhai.*  
*Singh ranees loto bhai, Ka kanaoring thabyoo bhai.*  
*Kanoriya kaochang losho bhai, Daong malolao sacho bhai.*  
*Singh raza loto bhai, Gata kanaoring bidaokee bhai.*  
*Do ring ring banna bhai, Markhaonao rampur bhai.*  
*Ikaratee baisho bhai, Do ring ring beema bhai.*  
*Thandayao saranang bhai, Kumo darbaro bhai.*  
*Do ring ring beema bhai, Wangtu chhamaddain bhai.*  
*Sarakyo taomaso shyamu bhai.*  
*Rai nizakoo pangmai bhai, Singh raza bada losho bhai.*  
*Ho hochi losho bhai, Singh raza sannoo bhai.*  
*Daong malolao sannoo bhai, Rai nizakoo chhagans bhai.*  
*Singh raza bada losho bhai.*

That is:

The lion king says,  
 "My lioness where are you.

I want to say something unto you,  
I shall go to Kinnaur,  
I want to eat flesh of a lamb."

The lioness responds,  
"Don't go to Kinnaur, O! the lion king,  
The people there are said to be ill-tempered.  
They kill noiselessly."

The lion king says,  
"I must go to Kinnaur."  
(and he started from the plains towards Kinnaur)  
As he advanced,  
He halted in the ground of Rampur for a night.  
Advancing further, he reached the cool Sarahan,  
There in the interior of durbar.

Further ahead,  
The lion king reached at the Wangtu bridge.  
Advancing further,  
He stopped in the Kalpa dale to watch a show.  
The people of Atth-bishi Pangi whispered,  
The lion king is approaching.  
And then, started shouting ho! ho!,  
To kill the lion king noiselessly,  
The youths of Atth-bishi (Pangi)  
The lion king is approaching.

There is hardly any aspect of life that has escaped notice in these folksongs. These are as subtle, unpretentious and free as the air on the mountaintops and the rills cascading down to the Satluj. Therefore, it may not be appropriate to bind them into the set categories. Nevertheless, for the convenience of discussion on them, it becomes necessary that these are defined into some broad categories, and to that end, these may be defined as: (1) episodic song, (2) devotional song, (3) sacramental song, (4) shepherds' song.

### **Episodic Songs**

The episodic songs outnumber any other category of the folksongs of Kinnaur. These not only illuminate the obscure

recesses of medieval history, but are the most touching and heart-rendering: many of them deeply steeped in pain and anguish. Among the episodal folksongs, mostly the ones related to the events of history that has impacted the life of common people and stirred their emotions may be included. Among these songs, the ones related to the *wazeers*, immigrant rulers, invasions, treaties, etc. are significant. These songs are important, for many episodes of the local history that has escaped notice of the feudal history, may be found recorded in these folksongs, at times in the hyperbolic narration to impress upon the divine intervention in the settlement of disputes. Here is one folksong of this category. This song describes the episode of escape of Tika Raghunath Singh of Bushahr to Sirmaur kingdom to save himself from the matrimonial alliance with the princess of Mandi kingdom:

*"Tika Sahibas lotash, ang hushyari ham tan?  
 Hushyari loshima, Tukpau waziri,  
 Tukpau waziri, Ran Bahadur Singh,  
 Ran Bahadras lotash, thu ringtoyin maharaj?  
 Ringmig ta thu ringtak, payin banbas bite,  
 Mandi byahang losho, ang ma khushi buda,  
 Namang ma zush, nu Mandiu Raniu.  
 Ran Bahadras lotash, nu batang ma ni,  
 Kin bapuji kochang, angu rono shecho.  
 Kinu rono shenma, angu shechis brobar.  
 Dai por ma sangstang, ang palgi tolyayin,  
 Ang chalni ham toyin? Ang chhariya ham toyin?  
 Ang palgi tolyayin, ang chhari tolyayin.  
 Dai por ma sangstang, Tiko maesh losho,  
 Bangyo bisharang, anenu bapu jiu.  
 Dak nesh neshi bima, Sirmoring darbaro,  
 Sirmoring darbaro, Raja Shamsher Pargas,  
 Shamsher Pargas lotash, ham bimo ki buda?  
 Ran Bahadras loshid, nishi sheli bushid,  
 Kisi sheli mani, kisi banbas losho,  
 Mandi byahang losho, Tiko ma khushi langyos.  
 Mandi, byahang ma lanma, ang deiiji firayin.  
 Tika Sahibas loshid, bapuji pang itak.  
 Simale sahibu hukam, Sirmoring darbaro,*

*Tikau Simale sherayin, manima muluk jafat,  
 Rai dyaro majang, Tika Simale pushid,  
 Simale darbar hachis, an bapu li bushid.  
 Bulbuli sangmig bero, Simale darbar hachis,  
 An bapus dak loshid, sai mi rono shenmig,  
 Palbaru majango, sai mi rono sheshid."*

That is:

The Tika Sahib said,  
 "Where's my clever official of  
 Tukpa wazeeri (*pargana*), Ran Bahadur Singh?"  
 Presenting himself before the Tika Sahib, he said,  
 "What is the order of Your Highness?"  
 The Tika said,  
 "What else can I say, we should go into exile.  
 They talk of the Mandi marriage, but I dislike it,  
 I do not care even to hear the Mandi Rani's name."  
 Ran Bahadur Singh replied,  
 "No, it is not good for your father, the  
 Raja Sahib, will feel ill of it and he will put me behind  
 bar."  
 Tika Sahib said,  
 "If you are imprisoned, that means I am imprisoned.  
 Have my palanquin ready at midnight. Where are my  
 palanquin bearers?  
 Where are my gold and silver stick holders?  
 Hold up the sticks and go on."  
 It was known to all before day-break that the Tika was  
 not there,  
 This news greatly surprised the raja.  
 Going straight down, the Tika reached Sirmaur –  
 At the palace of Raja Shamsher Prakash of Sirmaur.  
 The raja Shamsher Prakash inquired why the Tika of  
 Bushahr had come.  
 Wazeer Ran Bahadur Singh replied,  
 "We have come down for pleasure."  
 "No, not for pleasure, but you have escaped from  
 Bushahr."

Replied the Raja of Sirmaur.  
 Wazeer Ran Bahadur Singh said,  
 "There is a talk of Tika Sahib's alliance with Mandi,  
 But the Tika Sahib is averse to it."  
 "If he dislikes the Mandi match, then what about the  
 alliance with Sirmaur,"  
 Suggested the Raja of Sirmaur.  
 To that, the Tika Sahib told that he would ask his father.  
 Superintendent of Shimla Hill States directed Sirmaur  
 durbar:  
 The raja should immediately send him (the Tika) to  
 Shimla durbar.  
 A week later, the Tika Sahib reached Shimla.  
 His father also arrived there.  
 Next morning, Superintendent of Shimla Hill States  
 held durbar.  
 In the durbar, the Raja asked the Superintendent,  
 "The ten accomplices of the Tika should be  
 imprisoned."  
 And in a trice, they were thrown into jail.

### **Devotional Songs**

The devotional songs are popular in entire Kinnaur. While, in lower Kinnaur most of the devotional songs are dedicated to the local deities, some of these are also sung in praise of Devi. In fact, most of the native goddesses of lower Kinnaur have been interpreted to be the local manifestations of Shakti, and, thus, these are linked with other emanations of Shakti in Mandi and Kangra districts.

In upper Kinnaur, where the people are the ardent follower of the Himalayan Buddhism, songs in praise of the accomplished lamas and Buddhist deities are sung. Here is one of the popular songs, sung in praise of a Lochan Rimpoche (Locha Lama), who was invited by Tika Raghunath Singh of Rampur Bushahr from Tashilhunpo monastery to consecrate the Buddhist temple at Rampur in CE 1897:

*"Thochalo shong ta, sarpa yune zargyos,  
 Mi ta li losho, nu hatu chhayang?  
 Nu chhayang chhayang,  
 Rimpochheu chhayang,  
 Shong shongi bunma, khona rampura,  
 Khona rampura, Tika Sahibu ampi,  
 Tika sahibas loshid, buchayinyan Rimpochhe  
 Ki rampur toshiyin, gomfa bunate,  
 Locha lamas lotash, guru jiu wang maema,  
 Guru jiu wang maema, ki rampur toshiyin  
 Ki rampur toshiyin, gomfa bunate,  
 Gomfa bunate, ushangu karkhanang."*

That is:

From the upper country (Tibet) has arisen a new sun.  
 All men are saying,  
 "Whose light is that?"  
 This is the light of glory of Rimpoche Lama,  
 Locha Lama by name.  
 Coming down and ever down,  
 He arrives at Rampur,  
 Before the Tika Sahib.  
 The Tika said, "Welcome holy Locha Lama, on your  
 arrival.  
 Be pleased to stay in Rampur,  
 We will make a monastery for you here."  
 Upon that, the Locha Lama replied,  
 "I have no direction from my Spiritual Father to stay  
 here for ever."  
 Upon that the Tika said,  
 "You may stay here as long as you desire.  
 We will build a temple like that of Lhasa."

### Sacramental Songs

The sacramental songs, associated with various ritual dispensations on birth, marriage, death and numerous festivals, are too numerous in Kinnaur. However, the significant among those are

the panegyric narrations about the genesis and other exploits of the traditional village gods and goddesses. These eulogies are known as *chironing* in Kinnaur. Elsewhere in Himachal Pradesh, these are called *garani* or *deo-bharatha*. The oracle of a deity – the *grokch* – enters into trance on closing his eyes and deeply inhaling fumes of *dhoop* (an aromatic herb obtained from *Juniperus macropoda* or *Jurinea dolomieu*). Soon after, he starts uttering the *chironing* in monosyllabic diction, which only an accomplished interpreter can understand and explain. The *chironing* of Chandika of Kothi, Hirima of Kafaur and *Maishurs*, *Nags* and *Narains* of various villages are important in this regard for, these may provide very useful source material of anthropological, sociological and historical importance. Here is a part of one *chironing* that describes the genesis of *Maishurs* and some other deities of lower Kinnaur:

*"Dudang leyo dangshang yuchala dena,  
Mader gonon dawa.  
Thuchala shonga maderagono ayoo.  
Maderagono aaos lothsh yungze.  
Ya yungze! Ham vyomo bad duee?  
Banasiras lotishchha olo chhhongsa vyo duk,  
Zom goraboring ago.  
Goraboring ago gurvin hachis hirima devi.  
Zorames devi chondika.  
Dangchale zorames sungara maheshvar.  
Dangchale zorames bhaba monashiras.  
Dangchale zayash chagavn maheshur.  
Dangchale zayash nalche usha dev.  
Dangchale zayash lote sha tthote.  
Kakacho le dush, bag bantthi...."*

That is:

From down to up, talk of *Maishurs*.  
From up to down *Maishurs*.  
The mother of *Maishurs* said,  
Oh! Brother, my brother,  
Where for are you going?  
Banasur said, "Shall go to trade in salt."  
In the Gorboring cave,

In the Gorboring cave, Hirima conceived.  
 Chandika was born,  
 And thereafter Sungra *Maishur*.  
 Later was born Bhaba *Maishurs*.  
 Followed by Chagaon *Maishurs*.  
 Thereafter was born Usha Devi of Nichar.  
 Later were born dumb and deaf.  
 They divide territories for themselves....

### Shepherds' Songs

There are innumerable shepherds' songs associated with their arduous lifestyle in the wilderness. In these songs, the pangs of daily ordeals that they encounter in the thick of forests and rugged mountain slopes are vividly expressed. They have to endure hardship of lonesome days and months, herding their flocks in the treacherous ravines and alpine meadows. How they feel in the wild loneliness, is aptly expressed in the following shepherds' song:

*Palas chhango korimang.*  
*Sodeyee bonyon yungpee,*  
*Sodeyee zanzaloo koomon,*  
*Shoul-loshiman lee zanglo,*  
*Pata chhanee choo yutthung,*  
*Palas chhango hoje korimang.*  
*Chokti chulee koomon,*  
*Myatangmik mam-ban,*  
*Myatangmik bai-sai,*  
*Myatangmik suvang,*  
*Myatangmik dumber*  
*Palas chhango hoje korimang.*  
*Palas chhango korimang.*

That is:

The destiny of a shepherd boy,  
 Always dependant on the woods.  
 Always, fraught with distress.  
 Crouched among trees in summer,



In the thatch-hut shelter-less.  
 Such is the fate of shepherd boy.  
 Clouds burst, he endures.  
 Parted from parents, brothers and sisters.  
 Driven away from friends and companions.  
 Fallen away from gods and goddesses.  
 Such is the fate of shepherd boy.  
 The destiny of a shepherd boy.

Inalienable relation with the environment, hardy and laborious living, and their cattle, sheep and goats – these are the three stark facts of life in Kinnaur. People have sung songs for all these entities in diverse situations and different conditions. For instance, *sang-geethang* is the song that is sung only during the crack of dawn. Then, there are the seasonal songs for invoking the rain-god Chakoling-Dambar, and there are the songs related to the agrarian chores. In many songs, matrimonial alliances and disputes are recorded, but the love songs, expressing the curiosity and pangs, are rare. It may not be possible to talk about all those enchanting songs for the constraints of space. Despite all the odds that the nature has piled here, the people love the air they breathe, the forests and fields that keep them going among miseries, but with the hope for better life. Here is a song that expresses their despairs and hopes:

*Zindagi, chooli Zindagi.  
 Zindagyu maoza ma bada,  
 Ju kalajoog dayaro.  
 Ma usatang zumik –  
 Sheemig sunachyarang,  
 Kochang-pancho bai-sai,  
 Sheemig basarang shaung,  
 Larang gas dakk cho,  
 Khano chhvalee dkk cho,  
 Batee cho barandee dakk cho,  
 He, Onkar Bhagwan,  
 Maus tang jumik tha zangara.  
 Um shera,  
 Gol bas des,  
 Zindagi, chooli Zindagi.*

That is:

Life, my life!  
 Could find not bliss of living,  
 In this Kaliyug,  
 Got withered un-bloomed –  
 Thinking of the death.  
 The brothers-n-sisters of Kōchang-pancho,  
 Approaching death –  
 The garments shall remain,  
 The food in plate shall remain,  
 The wine in glass shall remain,  
 Oh! My Lord,  
 Don't shake off un-blossomed,  
 (But) let it bloom,  
 Like a fragrant flower –  
 Life, my life.

#### FOLKTALE

A folktale may be defined as the oral narrative of the common folk. The folktales, like the folksongs, pass around by the words of mouth. Therefore, like folksongs, these are also subject to modifications and changes depending upon the whim and idiosyncrasy of the individual tale-teller. However, the scope of such change remains more in the folktales than in the folksongs. Thus, the thematic and narrative flexibility is the essential quality of folktales that keeps them always contemporary and fresh like the cascading mountain rills. The tale-teller feels enthused by the innovations that he introduces in the tale and the listeners are filled with the suspense of what next. Thus, every teller comes with a new and contemporary version of the age-old tale.

The folktales of Kinnaur, as of other indigenous societies of the Himalay, are one of the most comprehensive repositories of the folk wisdom. In these, may be found preserved in unpretentious manner the hopes and aspirations of the people: the hard realities of their mundane existence and wonders of the unimagined world that they have cherished through generations. The subject matter of Kinnauri folktales is very varied, covering a vast panorama, exten-

ding over (a) *Religious Tales*, (b) *Historical Tales*, (c) *Ghost Tales*, and (d) *Ethical Tales*.

### Religious Tales

Among these broad classifications, the tales inspired by the religious traditions are largely the eulogistic accounts of the local deities – the *Maishur* and *Nags* or *Narains*. These are known as *chironing*. The *chronings* are available in both, the sung and prose forms. Most of the tales associated with the local gods of upper Kinnaur trace their origin to Lhasa or Central Tibet. For instance, the Dabla Devta of Kanam, as the associated tale tells, came from Lhasa in the disguise of a vulture and landed at Kanam as a small toy.<sup>2</sup> Besides, various popular legends associated with various natural features – mountains and peaks, weird rocks, gorges and precipices, streams, rivers, etc. have been woven in the tales. Among these, the tales woven around the weird rocks, associated with various local cults, are significant. Such cult-rocks are known as *pathoro*, and are regarded to represent local and classical deities. For instance, the huge rocks above village Rarang are regarded as the images of Shiv or Vishnu. These are also known as *pistgase*. We have already noted the tradition of propitiating ancestors, represented by stone piles (called *kotang*, *shikhar*, *shakari*, *shakuree*, etc.) on the eve of *Dakhraini*. We also know about the legendary footprints, *rLob-dpon-zhabs-rje*, of Padmsambhav on the rock at village Nako in upper Kinnaur. Similar relics on the living rocks exist at village Umla and Pokhar Dzong in Suru valley (Ladakh). Besides, there also exists a votive rock, carrying the footmarks of *Purgyal Lha* (Purgyal Devta) at Nako. Another example, though not related to Kinnaur, is a huge rock resting precariously over the other on the cliff near Danoghat (i.e., the abode of demon) on the Shimla-Mandi Road. This rock is known as the *Bhiun-galola*, i.e., the cannon of Bhim. He is known to have thrown that huge rock on a demoness, who was crushed under its weight, both staying put through ages. All these rocks have appeared variously in many tales. However, in such tales, told in very absorbing manner, most of the natural features are represented as of demonic nature.

Besides, the local versions of Pauranic lore, especially drawn from the *Ramayan* and *Mahabharat*, have been popular among the people of lower Kinnaur. However, the quintessential versions of various episodes of *Mahabharat* have been the most popular. In one of such popular tales – the *sang-geethang* – it is told that Kunti and Nati were two sisters. To beget sons, Kunti served a *rishi* for twelve years. However, when the time to get boon came, Nati, her sister, appeared before the *rishi* in her disguise and received the magical fruit. Thus, the sixty Kaurav-brothers were born to her. To get sons, Kunti had to undergo the same ordeal for another twelve years. Thus, five Pandav-brothers were born to her. The exploits of Pandav are of particular interest, for various aspects of the socio-cultural life of the people of Kinnaur may be found ingrained in them. In fact, most of the towering castles of Kinnaur are regarded as their handiwork. The legend associated with Labrang Castle is an example in this regard.

Then, the tales associated with the Himalayan Buddhism are very popular in upper Kinnaur. Among these, are the ones associated with the exploits of local *tulku* (incarnate) lamas. However, among such tales, the ones glorifying the exploits of Guru Padm-sambhav, the great *Lotsab* Richen Sangpo and his numerous incarnations, are told and heard with due reverence. In most of these tales, the anterior religio-cultural affiliations of the inhabitants of upper Kinnaur with Ladakh, Guge and Dbus-Gtsang (Central Tibet) are highlighted. These tales are of great importance for the religio-cultural history. Some of these might have been inspired by the actual happenings, but in the folkways these became fanciful and eulogistic and found way into the *terma* (the texts containing the legendary exploits of Padmsambhav) and *rNam-thar* (the biographical narratives of *Lotsab* Richen Sangpo) traditions. In fact, in the context of Himalayan (or Tibetan) Buddhism, the folk tradition of tale-telling and the literary enterprise have been complementary to each other. A good example of this may be the tales compiled in the Tibetan historical work *dPag-bsam-ljon-bzang*, translated and published by Sarat Chandra Das in *Indian Pandits in the Land of Snow*.<sup>3</sup> The tale continued to be regarded as fictitious until Francke discovered an inscription at Poo. In that inscription, not only the name of Lhachen Yeshe-O

(CE c. 967-1040) – the priest-king of Guge – and ten princes are mentioned, but also the names of villages Poo (*sPu*) and *dKor* or *dKor-khang* (Khor is now a part of the revenue village Poo), whereto those princes were sent to establish *lha-chos* (the religion of the gods, implies to be Buddhism) in place of *sngar-chos* (former religion) also figure. The local tradition at Poo also corroborates the fact that the first Buddhist temple was erected at the site of that inscription.<sup>4</sup>

### Historical Tales

Kinnaur, since the earliest times, has been a hotbed of intrigues between the rival clans, various unsavoury internal events, external invasions, loot and plunder, natural calamities, accidents, etc. Although, most of those events have escaped the notice of formal feudalistic history, yet those are well preserved in the memory of common folk through tales, told and retold through generations. In all such situations the people of Kinnaur, willingly or unwillingly, have remained always directly involved. The folk consciousness has always remained concerned to such events, and the people have given expression to all such events in their own subtle way. However, in most of such episodes, the role of some invisible demonic agency or malevolent spirit figures predominantly: that is how most of the historical incidences are interpreted in the folkways.

Among the historical tales, there are numerous related to the events of the feudal or political history of this region. The instances of invasions, loot and plunder by the Ladakhis, Muslims (*Kha-chhe*) and the Gurkhas (*Gorkha boirees*) have been told and retold by the elderly people through generations with a gripping flair. While, all such instances are reasonably recorded in the political history, the ironies and tragedies of the common people, though highly touching, have remained completely ignored. However, the folk consciousness has been very responsive to such incidences. The love affair of Dolma with a shepherd, named Tongku, is recorded in one of such popular tales. She wanted to become a *jomo*, but when she happened to meet a handsome and young shepherd, she started loving him. Her parents persuaded her to forget him and become a *jomo*, telling her:

*"Jomo lama tangma,  
Shoom baoshang dookhee, domya ta sukhee.  
Manaringas chaoeekoo doorai,  
Vaon-yoogas choaeekoo bage.  
Parayo bima tangma,  
Shoom baoshang sukhee, domya ta dookhee.  
Dhokhabon dhande lameek,  
Sare janjaloo komo."*

That is:

Should you become *jomo*,  
Struggle may be of few years.  
Later all comforts are yours.  
All folks shall adore you,  
People shall bow before you.  
Should you marry, you may enjoy,  
Carnal pleasures of a few years.  
Suffer later lifelong in the earthy affairs.

However, while grazing cattle in the forest, her friends advised her:

*"Zaee prayo share,  
dombar dayorango share."*

That is:

Women become graceful when married,  
Gods look graceful when socially carried.

Enthused by the advice of her friends, Dolma did not relent to the parental pressure. Tongku also frantically implored her parents to agree, but to no avail. At last, one day, she eloped with Tongku. Both lived together in an isolated cave. On the eve of *Dakhraini* festival at village Pangi, Dolma and Tongku got married, defying all pressures. When the parents and relatives of Dolma, heard about the marriage, they were enraged. Some of them found Dolma in the crowd, and forcibly took her away to her parents' home. Helpless and marooned, as she was, she kept thinking and impulsively walking on the mountain path. Finding no way to escape, she resolved to end her life. While passing through a deep gorge, she jumped into the stream.

When Tongku heard of her death, he could not bear the shock. He also jumped into the stream and ended his life, crying:

*"Dana panee chhootaya to,  
Konichoo bainang machhootaya."*

That is:

Life and all else are trivial,  
Against love bonds eternal.

### Ghost Tales

It has been customary in Kinnaur that during the winters, when the outdoor activities come to a grinding halt with the nature retiring to hibernation, donning a thick mantle of snow, people spend most of their time indoors. They engage themselves with spinning, knitting, weaving, etc., and listening to the tales during the long wintry nights. Telling tales has been an accepted age-earned prerogative of the grandparents and elderly people in the family. With the wrinkles of years of hardship writ large on their faces, they forget all the past severities for the moment and share a childlike innocence and inquisitiveness with the tiny tots, huddled around the central fire to protect themselves from the cold of freezing winter. While the children wait in restless expectation, the grandpa (or grandma) would musingly half-close his eyes as if shuffling through his mental dossiers. For a while, his eyes would twinkle and lo! A tale is there to be retold. Nevertheless, not all the elderly people have the knack of telling tales, nature has gifted only a few with that innate talent, and only a very few can tell them so empathically that the characters of tales appear to be real to the listeners.

The tales of ghosts and spirits, inspired by the instinct of primitive inquisitiveness, are probably the oldest in the tradition of telling tales. These fantasies might have caught imagination of man in the primitive darkness, when he was constantly being haunted by the domineering mysteries of nature. The fluxion of that incomprehensible arbitrariness was expressed by him in the ghost and spirit symbolism. He contrived flattering eulogies to humour those invisible elements and to unburden his soul of the

looming fear psychosis. That awe-inspired reverence gave birth to many legends, which have been told and retold through generations to our time.

Besides, the innate inquisitiveness has also given birth to many tales. These highlight the mysterious play of uncanny ghosts and rambling spirits. To make such tales more horrifying and believable, the dreary and forbidden sites in the locality are associated with them. In each village of Kinnaur, one may be shown a particular ravine, chasm, an uninhabited, deserted house or mighty oak haunted by a ghost or malignant spirit. These demonic illusory beings also seem to be living side by side with the people.

Although, under the changing scenario, when the forbidden and feared places and surroundings of yore have become more open and oft frequented, the ghost tales may be found gradually losing their terrifying character, yet these still have the attraction and grip over the people and such tales are among the most-told ones. The village folks, especially the children, still feel afflicted by the fear of *Savaniya* (or *Sa-o-ni*), *Dakinis* (malignant rambling female forest and mountain spirits) and ghosts. The tales woven around these dreadful beings have all the ingredients to overwhelm the innocent and gullible listeners with the charm and anticipation of the imaginary world that seems to emerge out in countless forms from the smoke of smouldering fire in the dimly-lit room. Woven with the warp and woof of such strands of imagination, the polychromatic fabric of Kinnauri folktales is very vivid and vast. These tales, deeply steeped in the dramatic ironies – joy and sorrow, agony and ecstasy, melancholy and cheer, hate and love, intrigue and frankness, treachery and loyalty, sincerity and knavery – reflect numerous obscure aspects of the Kinnauri folk life in a most intimate and vivid manner.

Among the ghost tales, the tale of Hina Dandub and Latee Sarjang is the most popular in most parts of Kinnaur. Though deeply steeped in fantasy, people regard it to be an actual happening. Many local versions of this tale are current among the people. The tale of Hina Dandub and Latee Sarjang is also recorded in the Tibetan Buddhist texts. According to one popular version, once the king of village Pangi, Shar by name, had a daughter named Latee Sarjang and a son named Hina Dandub.



It so happened, that the wife of king while on the deathbed, took a promise from raja that he would not remarry after her death lest her children – Hina Dandub and Latee Sarjang – should be ignored. Once, the raja went out in a forest for hunting. There he met a beautiful maiden, seated on a rock. She incited the king and he married her. In fact, she was a treacherous demoness, who wanted to kill the prince and princess. To fulfil her objective, she conspired with the royal astrologer-cum-*vaid*. One day, as per plan, she pretended to be sick. Raja immediately summoned the royal astrologer-cum-*vaid*. He declared that the rani was critically sick and she could only be cured if the levers of prince and princess were fed to her. When the rani and her accomplice, astrologer-cum-*vaid*, pressurised the raja, he had to relent. He ordered that the prince and princess be killed and their levers fed to the rani.

Accordingly, the royal children were given to the butcher, who took them to a distant cliff, but failed to behead them. Twice he lifted his dagger, but once the maternal uncle of those children appeared from the rock and stopped him. In the next attempt, their deceased mother appeared from a water pond and stopped the butcher. Ultimately, he let the royal children escape, and to save himself from the punishment, killed dogs and took their levers to the palace.

Wandering in the forest, the children lost track of each other. The young prince happened to meet an old woman. She took him to her hut, fed and clothed him. She took him to the town, where she learnt that the king of that kingdom had died without an heir, and the customary process for finding the new king was being followed. That custom provided that a person chosen by the royal parrot by throwing a garland around his neck shall be the king. As the providence had it, the parrot garlanded the young prince, who was enthroned as the king of that kingdom.

On the other hand, the grief-stricken young princess kept searching for her brother in the forest, and assuming that he has been eaten by the wild animals, would pick pieces of bones, assuming those of his brother, and put them in a necklace. At last she reached the town, where she learnt that her brother was the king. She became a street singer. Once, the raja heard her voice that instantaneously reminded him of his lost sister. He asked one

of his servants to get her footprints, which he at once recognised of her sister. The raja immediately brought her to his palace, and both lived comfortably.

After sometime, the young raja and his sister thought of visiting their father and their demonic stepmother. They took a small army and went to meet their father. In the company of that demoness, he was in a pathetic condition. On seeing his children, he was filled with deep remorse and died. The son performed his last rites. As he was returning from the cremation, he saw his demoness stepmother carrying a carcass of dog on her shoulder. On seeing the young king, she threw the carcass and pounced upon him. However, the young king shot an arrow and killed her.

A *chorten* was built over her ashes at Pangri lest her spirit should torment the people.

### Ethical Tales

Many folktales of Kinnaur are inspired by folk traditions, popular beliefs and customary ideas. The significant quality of these folktales is that these tales, like the old wives' tales, are poignant with pithy elements of folk wisdom told symbolically through the metaphorical use of avian and zoomorphic characters, besides the usual human characters. In this respect, these may easily be regarded as the folk-*Panchatantra* of Kinnaur. These folktales can be defined into two broad categories on the consideration of their characters.

In the first category are the ones, in which the animals and birds are the leading characters. Among these, the cow, calf, ram, lamb, cat, rat, stag, bear, dog, monkey, horse, fox, coyote, wolf, leopard, lion, pigeon, partridge, crow, hawk, vulture, frog, lice, bug, etc. figure prominently. How the moral and educative values have been highlighted in such tales, may be known from this example:

Once, a cow and tigress lived together in a forest, while their calf and cub lived together separately. One day, the tigress could not find anything to eat and in desperation, killed the cow and ate it. When the cub learnt of the deceitful conduct of his mother, he persuaded her to a cliff and pushed her down to death. Thereafter, the cub and calf continued to live together as good friends. Apprehensive about the safety of his friend from the other preda-

tors in the forest, one day, the cub tied a bell in the neck of calf so that he could ring it while in distress. One day, when the calf was far away from the cub, he loudly rang the bell and the cub ran hurriedly to his rescue. However, on reaching the spot, he found the calf safe and sound. On asking, the calf replied that he was testing his (cub's) sincerity. The cub quietly went back. Sometime later, the calf was really in trouble. He desperately rang the bell, but the cub did not care.

In the second category may be placed those, in which the human characters are the main players. Among these are: a dishonest man, a wicked woman, old men and women, lama, thief, *wazeer*, stepmother, *raja-rani*, etc. In these tales, the unkind and spiteful behaviour of stepmothers and co-wives have found subtle and honest expression. Most of the characters of these tales are the marooned children and old parents. Inspired by the themes and settings in the immediate surroundings, these folktales vividly reflect different aspects of the local environment and living. In fact, no aspect of life from the traditional customs, beliefs, manners, food habits, lifestyle, daily routine, etc., has escaped from these folktales. Primarily intended for the entertainment of the children, these tales are rich in educative contents. Here is an example:

Once there lived an old man and his son. The old man had married his son seven times in the past, but all his daughters-in-law proved unbecoming. Therefore, the old man had asked his son to disown them. Thus, the son, living with his old father, had no wife.

Once, the old man went to his friend. There he saw a young and beautiful girl. He asked the girl for cold water; the young girl offered him fresh and cold *lassi*. While drinking *lassi*, he put several questions to her, and she promptly and wisely answered them all. The old man was impressed. He asked his friend if he would agree to marry his daughter to his son, to which the father of girl consented. In due course, the young man again got a wife.

Having been with her husband for some days, the bride found him to be a fool and worthless person. To make him wise and active, she advised her father-in-law to address him by the magic word '*qualcut*' next day early in the morning. Next morning, the old man did as told and the buffoon turned wiser at once. The old

man was amazed at his wisdom and promptness. That day, he went to jungle to fetch wood. Standing before a tree, he commanded it to fall. The tree instantaneously fell down into several pieces. Those logs started rolling behind him and followed him to his home. His father and wife were wonderstruck at the sight.

The young man made a cot out of that wood and he sold that to the king of that country. When the raja slept on that cot for the first time one night, he heard several voices coming from all sides. When he carefully heard those sounds, he found that the legs of that magical cot were talking to each other. The raja became alert, but pretended to be fast asleep. After sometime, one of the legs said, "I am going out, keep the cot propped up." On returning, the leg told its companion, "Thieves have entered the royal treasury and I have locked them for the raja to arrest them." After sometime, the second leg went out and found a snake in the shoe of the raja, which it announced to its companion. Similarly, the third leg went out and announced on return that *Yamdoot* (a messenger of the lord of death) shall arrive tomorrow to take away the life of raja. Should the king put a garland around the neck of that *Yamdoot*, his death can be averted. The fourth leg went out and on returning announced that a diamond was concealed in the belly of a corpse of *sadhu* lying in the river. The raja had been attentively hearing all that conversation.

Next morning, when he got up, he found all that he had heard to be correct. However, he was very terrified about his death, which, he felt was knocking at the door. However, the moment he saw the *Yamdoot* approaching him, he immediately put a garland on his neck. The *Yamdoot* felt befriended, and asked the raja for a substitute of his namesake. Impulsively, he suggested his brother-in-law, who was his namesake. The *Yamdoot* took away his life, leaving the raja alive.

The queen of raja was filled with sorrow for what her husband has done to her brother. She abused and cursed him. Upon that, the raja felt very much hurt and wanted to end his life. He took his wife to the cremation ground and sat on the pyre for her to see that he was dying. All of a sudden, the raja saw a ram and sheep on the corner. The ram was pulling down a branch of tree to get green leaves. However, he pulled it down but not enough for the

sheep to get the leaves. The sheep asked the ram to pull it down enough for her. Upon that, the ram scolded her by saying that he was not as fool as the raja on the pyre, who wants to die because his wife desired so. Hearing that, the raja felt ashamed of his lowly action. He got down from the pyre and dragged his wife to the palace, where he chastised her.

#### FOLKDANCE

How profound is the lust for dance among the people of Kinnaur, may well be known from the fact that for it, neither age nor gender or social status comes in the way. To partake of the bliss of this performance, one has to dance at par. The natural predilection for dancing among the people of Kinnaur, especially of the lower Kinnaur, may affirm their concern for this-worldly existence. To live and live contentedly is fundamental to the folk psyche of Kinnaur, as elsewhere in the Himalayan interiors, and this aspect is vividly expressed in the colourful spectra of Kinnauri folkdances. Traditionally, Kinnaur is known for the variety of its placid and blissful group dances. Among many dances, the *borcho natee* is a well-known participatory community dance, which the people perform to honour the person who kills a leopard (called lion in Kinnaur). People perform it in such a wild gusto to the tune of loud music that it can even inspire the stubborn to swing in unison. Continuing for hours together under the restrained inebriated influence of *rakh*, *chhang* or *ark*, there is hardly any distinction between the dancer and the viewer in the *natee*. Everybody in the arena is a dancer and the viewer at the same time. As the tired and exhausted dancers withdraw, fresh aspirants take their places and, thus, the *natee* (or *kayang*) continues unabated for hours and hours on different paces and beats.

The *khar* and *gomphona* dances are the only exceptions to that rule: these are the solo dances. The *gomphona* dance is performed to break the monotony of long winters in the four walls of houses.

The ritualistic dances, performed by the lamas in the Buddhist monasteries, include all the three types of dance performances – the group dance, duet and solo performance. In the solo dance performed by the Buddhist monks in the monasteries, the perfor-



The bejewelled dancers.

mer is a lone individual. However, there is a band of the auxiliary performers and musicians on the sidelines to complement him. The duets are traditionally unknown to the people of Kinnaur, but there are quite a few of such ritualistic dances performed by the lamas. Interestingly, although the ancient *khoond* institution exists in Kinnaur, yet the well-known duet performance, the *thoda* dance associated with that institution, is unknown to the Kinnauras.

The people of Kinnaur have natural penchant for dancing. Attired in their enchanting traditional costumes and ornaments, when these people dance in ecstasy on the rhythm of musical instruments, one impulsively feels enraptured and transported to the enthralling assemblage of the *Kinnars* and *Gandharvs* in Alkapuri – the Shangri-La of Indian classics.

The nature has endowed the Kinnauri womenfolk with the physical suppleness and effortless movements that makes them as one of the best dancers in the entire Himalayan region. That effect is accentuated manifold when they appear profusely laden with the leaf-thin jewellery. There is generally no gender bias in the dances: all males and females can perform collectively or separately, in the gender-specific groups, according to the given situation. The *kayang*, the *japaro-natee* and the *dabar-kyang* are some

of such liberal dances. Nevertheless, there are a few gender-specific dances too. For instance, the *bakayang* is performed by the women-folk only; and the *bon-kayang*, *banayungachoo-chasheeming* and *thar-kayang* are the male preserves.

Inspired by the hoary traditional cultic-systems and performed in the open of lush green meadows under the shadow of snow-covered peaks around in utter abandon by the effortless rhythmical steps and movements to the beats of traditional musical instruments, these dances are the honest expression of the religio-aesthetic urge of the people. Under the obtaining harsh climatic condition in the rugged and unyielding terrain, the people have been traditionally working very hard even to eke out subsistence, as one popular saying: *zamin gato, koshtang bodi*, i.e., meagre food after tiring drudgery, tells. Therefore, the people living here have naturally imbibed the dictum of *sahaj pake so mittha hoye*, i.e., slow and steady wins the race. That mindset is subtly reflected on their group dances. These may last for hours, with the people dropping out exhausted and joining simultaneously at their convenience. At times, a boozy and staggering dancer may drift out of the 'chain' for a solo performance, unmindful of what is going on around. The people here are compulsive dancers and singers.

The origin of dance among the Kinnauras can also be traced to certain primitive ritualistic orgies in similar naturalistic belief-systems. The diluted traces of those primitive traditions may still be found in certain ritualistic dances that the people perform on various festivals to appease their demonic deities and ancestors. Although, having passed through the fine sieve of time, most of the dances have now become considerably liberated from the archaic accretions, yet the nuances of traditional religio-social value system are still noticeable in many of them. Hence, ordained by tradition and sanctified by usage, these dances are much refined, restrained and adaptable today. Most of the Kinnaura group dances that the people perform on the festivals are essentially dedicated to the village gods. Thus, these dances are the collective expression of thanksgiving of the votaries to their patron-deity. At times, the deities also reciprocate by joining with them. The dances performed by the lamas on the dolorous tunes of the monastic musical instruments are essentially the ritualistic panto-

mimic performances. These are generally performed in a regulated, stoic and restrained manner to invoke the indulgence of benevolent Mahayanic Buddhist deities and to suppress the demonic fiends.

The one peculiarity of the dance performance in Kinnaur is that an experienced dancer always leads the troupe. He is known by various names as the *dhure*, *maalee* or *gaan*. He decides the step movement, rhythm and pace of the dance. He usually flaunts a yak-tail flywhisk or religious symbol of the village deity in his right hand that lends a pharisaic touch to the whole performance. That flywhisk also acts as the baton to regulate the rhythm of the musical instruments and the pace of steps. At times, a colourful scarf or a handkerchief may be used in place of flywhisk, but for all dances performed on the eve of religious celebrations, flywhisk is mandatory. The troupe leader holds the hand of co-dancer on his right and that process is carried until the last dancer in the chain. The moment the *dhure* nods by lowering the 'baton', the dancers start moving, bending a little with each step. On every fourth step, the chain of dancer pauses for some *matras* (timings) and then picks up again. In the middle part, everyone, young and old, men and women, are free to join the chain without any inhibition. The group dances of this area are generally performed on the *vilambit tal*, i.e., the slow rhythmic pace.

Many group dances in Kinnaur require special outfits. For instance, the dancers in *horing-pho* performance ('deer-dance') are required to wear typical headgears, fitted with antlers. Similarly, in *thar-kayang* performance, one of the dancers in the troupe has to put on a tiger mask on his face and clothes resembling tiger's skin. In the Buddhist upper Kinnaur, the lama dancers don very impressive masks of demons and angles on their faces for performing ritual dances and pantomimes. These masks are usually made of papier-mâché and embellished with bright colours.

The role of music has been fundamental to the dance. It may be unconceivable to think of dance without music, and even when the formal orchestral accompaniment is unavailable, the *dhure* may extemporise it even in imagination and time his steps and movements accordingly, beckoning for others to follow him. However, generally dance is preferred over the song, and for that reason, most of the songs and musical instruments are rhythm-based. In



the rugged ambiance of Kinnaur, where the glacial rills cascade down into innumerable fast-flowing and thundering streams, the music is generally rhythm-based. The gloomy notes produced by the traditional musical instruments, blend harmoniously with the slow-paced (if not sluggish) dances of this region. Many of these, especially the ones performed during the religious ceremonies in the cloistered atmosphere of monasteries, are deeply influenced by the dogmas and ritualism.

Even the secular dances here bear a strong stamp of ritualism, which fact is unmistakably revealed from the *chauri* (flywhisk) or the religious symbol of the village deity that the *dhure* flaunts. Since, most of the dances of this region, especially in upper Kinnaur, are the ritual-centric group performances, these are necessarily accompanied by various types of rhythm-based musical instruments, with the occasional use of certain tone-based dolorous instruments. Among these instruments, the musical instruments of the Buddhist upper Kinnaur are typical. Some of these are made of bone, even of human thighbone, but such instruments are only used for the monastic tantric rituals. We have already noted those instruments in the context of Folksong. Besides setting the *tal* (rhythm) of the dance, the use of these instruments with the dance also carries the mystic significance. At times, vocal music (a song) is also introduced as an adjunct to the instrumental music. In fact, in this area, as in the rest of Buddhist Himalayan region, the music, whether instrumental or vocal, is essentially committed to dancing. However, the dance by itself is also not regarded as an aesthetic expression or art, but a 'tool' for some religious dispensation in the entire Tibetan Buddhist diaspora.

How significant and central are the dances for the people of Kinnaur may be known from the fact that many of the Kinnauri songs are simply identified with the dances only. Among such songs, the *horing-pho* song is important one. It is sung with the famous *horing-pho* dance (or pantomimic performance), i.e., the 'deer-dance'. This performance is so named, because while performing it, the dancers put on special headgears, fitted with antlers. Probably, on the peculiarity of this dance, the people of Kinnaur have also been known as *hiran-nartak*, i.e., the 'deer-dancer'. The popularity of *horing-pho* operatic performance has extended to

other neighbouring districts also. Thus, this dance form is known by different names at different places, and several local versions of this dance are popular in the districts of Kullu, Shimla and Sirmaur in Himachal Pradesh, where the *hirnyatar* dance is its most popular version. Similarly, *soma-helang* songs are sung with *soma-helang* dance, and *thar-geethang* is sung with *thar-kayang*, i.e., the leopard dance.



The performers and villagers dancing in unison.

Most of Kinnauri dances are all-season performances of universal appeal. Among these, the notable ones are the *shen*, *gyakashen*, *katakan*, *samagyak*, *yadon-madon*, *rek-sheng*, *shabaro*, *balba*, *lushen*, *talee-lamo*, *maun-shaoo*, *lakapa-karchzee cheza*, etc. Then, there are the ones that can only be performed on particular occasions only, such as the *japaro*, *dabar-kayang*, *poolashen*, *somahelang*, *thar-kayang*, *thangroo*, *nagana-kayang*, etc.

Inspired by the mystico-religious urge, some of the Kinnauri dances, especially in Buddhist upper Kinnaur, may be defined as the ritual dances. These are not intended to be recreational, but are performed under the strict canonical discipline within the four-walls of the monasteries on special occasions by the lamas for accomplishing some mystic sacrament. The *shaini*, *makar* and *bukum*

are some of such dances. Besides, in lower Kinnaur, significant among such dances are the *tego swang*, *gar*, and *sangala*. The *sangala* dance has a few sub-varieties, viz., the *kayang*, *bakayang*, *bonayang-choo*, etc.

### Kinnauri Variety Programme

Our discussion will remain incomplete, if the *toshing* of lower Kinnaur and *chhanka* of upper Kinnaur and the neighbouring Spiti is not discussed. This veritable 'variety programme' of the people of Kinnaur is something in which all aspects of folk entertainment are put together in merrymaking. The *toshing* or *chhanka* is one of the most wholesome and captivating performance, in which songs, music, dances are integrated. I happened to savour this exhilarating performance in one of my wanderings in the trans-Himalayan region. The blissful memory of the musical night is still as vividly fresh in my mind as it was in that night years ago.

Dressed in their best for the dance and music, the young and beautiful damsels emerged out with so fairy-like ease and grace from the smoky crepuscular atmosphere that I felt impulsively transported to the legendary Alkapuri of the *Kinnars* and *Gandharos* of Kalidas's *Kumarsambhav*. The *toshing* and *rakh* and the *chhanka* and *chhang* are regarded inseparably complementary to each other; one without the other is lustreless and incomplete. The mild intoxicating effect of home-made liquor, music and dance impulsively takes one to the fairy world. In that dreamy atmosphere, the sharp sound of the metallic canisters appeared dull against the sonorous high-pitched voice of those maidens. I could not understand what they were singing, but that hardly bothered me, for the whole performance was too melodious to overwhelm my sensibility. The whole atmosphere on the terrace was simply mirthful. The echoes of music, reverberating from the distant cliffs and ranges and gradually melting away in the valley gave a subtle feeling of the nature joining in unison in that extravaganza. That reminded me of what Kalidas wrote on *Kinnar-Gandharv* music and dance in his *Kumarsambhav*:

"Yah poorayankeechakarandhrabhagandaree  
mukhotthena damiranena,

*Udgasyatamichhati kinnaranam  
tanpradayitva mivopagantum."*<sup>5</sup>

That is:

When flute released musical notes,  
Kinnar-Gandharv filled that in deep.  
Himalay joined in unison,  
Singing them in echoes repeat.

It is impossible for the onlooker to remain aloof and unattached from performance. The whole atmosphere immersed in music, dance and the intoxicating effect of *rakh* or *chhang* is too tempting for any one to hold back. In fact, the best way to enjoy this performance is to be a part of it. In that atmosphere of leisurely abandonment, one may find his feet impulsively tapping to the rhythm of musical notes. For sometime, one may feel lifted from the terra-firma into the unearthly sphere. Kalidas also imagined that blissful situation in his *Kumarsambhav* thus:

*"Geetantareshu shramavarileshaih  
Kishchitsamuchhvasitapatrakelham,  
Pushpasavadhoornitanetrashobhi priyamukham  
Kimpurushashchuchumbe."*<sup>6</sup>

That is:

Smudgy writing on paper  
Showed Kinnar's mood drunken.  
Deeply sunk in the lovely melody,  
The lover kissed his beloved-one.

### FOLK THEATRE

In upper Kinnaur and rest of the neighbouring trans-Himalayan region, where the Himalayan Buddhism is the way of life for the majority of people, the theatre has developed in a very quint-essential manner with entirely different mannerism and diction. The monastic opera of that region is dominated by the mythology inspired by the Nyingmapa cultic belief-system. Under the constraints of dogmatic ritualism of that system, no modification or alteration in those performances is permissible. Therefore, the

theme and its performance, the costumes and make-up, the orchestra and music, etc., everything is strictly codified, defined and traditionally ordained.

At the predetermined occasion, the costumes, masks, musical instruments and other items are ceremoniously taken out from the coffer of the monastery for performance, and are scrupulously deposited back after use. Any deviation from the custom amounts to sacrilege. Dressed in those loose and flowing, multi-coloured gorgeous costumes, with faces covered with brightly coloured masks, the monk-actors perform various types of physical gestures – jumping, dancing, flaunting ritual weapons, crying and howling, etc., charging the whole environment with terrifying magical anticipation. The droning and funeral music of the monastic orchestra, comprising *kangling*, *gailing*, *ragadun*, *juzjang*, *nashuk*, etc., heightens that dreadful effect manifold.

Under the Himalayan Buddhist influence, two very captivating and interesting types of operatic performances, popularly called the *chhams*, have developed in Kinnaur, especially in its Buddhist upper part and its trans-Himalayan Buddhist neighbourhood. These are: (a) the *chhams-gos-rigzs*, and (b) the *Buchhen chhams*.<sup>7</sup>

### **Chhams-gos-rigzs**

In fact, the *chhams-gos-rigzs*, i.e., the operatic mask performances are the 'mystic plays' of the Himalayan Buddhism. The lamas within the precincts of their monasteries exclusively perform these. Although, these ritual performances may look horrifying, and probably for that reason these are generally dubbed as the 'devil dance', yet how far are these 'devilish', may be a matter of opinion. In fact, none of these performances, which the lamas enact while wearing quaint costumes and dreadful masks, are meant to awe, but to embolden and protect by dispelling and destroying the 'devilish' forces, like the *sTag-dmar*, i.e., the Red Tiger Devil, after whom the *sTag-dmar-chhams* is known, and so on.

The tradition of *chhams-gos-rigzs* is regarded as of the pre-Buddhist origin. According to Waddell, "originally it appears to have been a devil-dancing cult for exorcising malignant demons and human enemies, and associated with human sacrifice and,



A theatrical performance.

probably, cannibalism.”<sup>8</sup> However, after the Padmsambhav-Shantarakshit team introduced the institutionalised Buddhism in Tibet in CE 749,<sup>9</sup> the cult of ‘devil-dancing’ was assimilated into Buddhism with considerable modifications. That modified form of ‘devil-dancing’ came to be defined as the *chhams-gos-rigzs*, i.e., the ‘mystic play’. However, in popular usage, it remained as the *sTag-dmar-chhams* or the dance of the Red Tiger Devil. The *sTag-dmar* or the Red Tiger Devil is regarded to be a deity of the Bon – the pre-Buddhist animistic religion of Tibet.<sup>10</sup>

The *chhams-gos-rigzs* is normally performed on special celebrations in the monasteries for the accomplishment of certain religious rites. Nevertheless, the lay folks from the surrounding villages also congregate on such occasions not only to gain religious merit, but also to savour in the bliss of mystic play of the lamas. On such occasions, the performing lamas don *phod-kha*, the quaint but very striking and stunning ceremonial loose-fitting costumes of blue colour with long arms. They also put on masks of various forms and expressions over their faces. The lamas make those masks in the monasteries under the canonical discipline. These masks are finished in the canonically defined colours. No change in the form, expression or treatment is permitted. The ancient masks are wooden, but now these are mostly made of papier-mâché.

There are several traditions associated with mask-performances

in Kinnaur and elsewhere in the Buddhist trans-Himalayan region. According to one of them, the theatrical performance with the terrifying masks is intended to forewarn the people about the perils and predicaments that the soul of a person may encounter after his death. The characters wearing those horrifying masks represent the devils that may agonise the soul during the transitory period. To ensure safe passage for the departed soul, a lama wearing *samghati* (sacred robe of a monk made of twenty-five patches) and flaunting *phurb-bu* (mystic dagger) scares the devils away. This tradition is significant, for it affirms the supremacy of Buddhist tenets over the pre-Buddhist animistic dogmas.

It is also believed that these monastic operas are the symbolic representation of the historic incident related with the development of Buddhism in Tibet. The introduction of Buddhism by Padm-sambhav under the patronage of King Trhisong Detsen (CE 747-797) and its popularity under the succeeding kings attracted fierce resistance from the pre-Buddhist Bon religionists, who rallied under King Langdarma (*ca.* CE 838-842), an arch enemy of Buddhism. He did his utmost to wipe out the organisational network of Buddhism during his short reign of about three years, until a monk named Peldorje murdered him in a well-planned stratagem. The monastic mystic plays are the symbolic enactment of that epoch-making episode.

These monastic mystic plays have also been explained ontologically in term of the Buddhist tantric belief-system. According to that, this performance is a symbolical expression of the establishment of Buddhism against the destructive forces. The terrific characters of this performance are the representations of different manifestations of violent aspect of Vajrpani. To purge the soul of external profanities, strict self-control is essential, and the ten terrific aspects of Vajrpani, popularly known as *Krodh Devs*, represent the ten elements of self-control. Those *Krodh Devs* are also regarded as the guardians of ten directions.

### **Buchhen Chhams**

Though the Buchhens, the professional performers, belong to the Pin valley of the Spiti sub-division of Lahul & Spiti district, yet

they are as relevant to the social setup of Kinnaur as they are for Spiti. Therefore, it is imperative that their operative activities are discussed here as well. The Pin valley has been one of the toughest and inaccessible terrains of the trans-Himalayan region, and for that reason, it has earned the reputation of 'valley of danger.' Because of its remoteness and sequestered position, the Buchhens remained almost unknown to and secluded from the rest of world since ages until this valley was opened up for the fair-weather vehicular traffic in the recent past. However, the journey to this 'valley of danger' is still beset with numerous perils, for which one should be well prepared before venturing into it. However, it is a favourite haunt for the trekkers.

The ethnic traits of these people are quite un-Mongolian, and their features and physique bear a very close affinity with the Indian characteristics to indicate their Mon linkage. That may follow that the Buchhens have been the beleaguered scions of the Khash of the mid-Himalayan region. Having remained in close contacts with the pre-Buddhist Bon community in the trans-Himalayan fastness, the Buchhens have imbibed certain *Bon* traits and traditions, and some of the striking features of the *Bon-chos* practices may be seen among them even today.

However, the Buchhens of Pin valley had been one of the very few trans-Himalayan communities, which probably had come under the proselytising influence of the Vajrayan Buddhism of Padmasambhava prior to his Central Tibetan odyssey.<sup>11</sup> Under that influence, the Buchhens have been the followers of Nyingmapa or the 'Unreformed Order' of the Himalayan Buddhism before that was introduced in Central Tibet in CE 749 under the patronage of King Trhisong Detsen (CE 747-797). For that reason, some of the oldest establishments of Nyingmapa may be found in Pin valley.<sup>12</sup>

Under the unyielding and harsh geo-climatic condition in this valley, the agriculture has been almost negligible and the living extremely tough. That has made the Buchhens a wandering community, perhaps a community of the wandering recluses. Dressed in their typical traditional costumes, they keep on wandering in small groups from place to place in Kinnaur, Spiti, Lahul and places as far as Kullu, Shimla and Mandi districts to supplement their living by singing, dancing, performing ballets,





A *Buchhen* performer.

etc. They are well-known for their captivating sword-dance and plays, locally known as *chhams*. Equipped with their typical outfits, they enact war between the *Bon* and Buddhist gods in some of those plays and dances.

According to one tradition, the origin of *Buchhen chhams* may be traced to the proscription of Buddhism by the bigot King Langdarma (ca. CE 838-842). The followers of Buddhism in Tibet were subjected to untold tortures and miseries. While many of them

were done to death, many others fled away to the Western Tibet. They reached Trilokinath in Pattan valley (Chandrabhaga valley). At Trilokinath, they meditated upon a local god, named *Bhang-ri Lizm*, and invoked his indulgence for redemption. To relieve the people of their miseries, the god reincarnated himself as *Chzyong-shiyog Gyelpo* in the house of a king named *Byang Shi-ong Gyelpo*. The descendents of that *Chzyong-shiyog Gyelpo* came to be known as the *Buchhens*. Since then, the *Buchhens* have been on the move from place to place to re-establish the tenets of Buddhism and spread the message of *Dharm* among the people. To attract the interest of people to their mission, they convey their message through the theatrical performances.

The plot of *Buchhen* theatrical performance is based on a popular folklore, which is sung during the performance. According to that lore, once a recluse lived in a forest. He once washed his dirty cloak in a pool of water. A doe drank that water and she became pregnant. In due course of time, that doe gave birth to a girl, which she silently abandoned in front of the cave, wherein the recluse lived. The recluse brought up the child with motherly care and she blossomed like a rising sun in her youth. She was named *Suryamukhi*. Soon the talk of her unblemished beauty became a

hot topic in the kingdom. The king of that kingdom was attracted towards her. Ultimately, he married her, but that agonised other senior queens in the palace. They started feeling jealous of her beauty. Ultimately, they hatched a conspiracy against her and spread a tirade that she was a cannibal. When the king heard that, he banished Suryamukhi from his kingdom. However, the conspiracy was soon exposed, and the king brought Suryamukhi back to the palace. The other queens were punished with death.

That episode forms the central theme of Buchhen performance. Different Buchhen troupes enact this episode in different manner to maintain novelty, but the central theme remains always the same. The convenience of actors and the obtaining local circumstances also sometime necessitate modifications and changes in the performance. Besides this fascinating episode, the Buchhen performers also enact plays based on popular Buddhist folklore.

To improvise a 'stage', the performers put together the low-raised square wooden tables that the monks use in the monasteries. A few bronze images of Buddhist deities, sacramental artefacts and weapons are also placed on the stage to lend a touch of religiosity. A silken curtain is raised behind the stage. On that curtain, the *thankas* (Buddhist scroll-paintings) are displayed. Behind the screen, the artistes improvise their 'greenroom'.

To start, all the actors line up on the stage, attired in loose silken cloaks and the crown-like bejewelled head-dresses. When every thing is set to order, the leading actor sounds *kangling* or the *gailing* to drive away the evil spirits that may be hovering around. At that time, the other actors look towards the sky to invoke blessing of gods. After the sanctifying ritual, the performance is started.

During the play, the artistes also perform the hair-raising sword dance, for which the Buchhens are known not only in the neighbouring places, but widely in the interiors of Western Himalayan region. The sword dancing performance includes various split-second manoeuvrings and tricks. Some of the dancers even balance their bodies on the tip of sword, and holding swords in their hands, perform the dances.

In upper Kinnaur area, there has been a tradition of performing the plays based on the popular ballads. Among that, *horing-pho* is

an operatic performance. This performance is named so, because, while enacting it, the actors put on special headgears fitted with antlers, as noted earlier. This ballet, with certain local modifications, is enacted outside Kinnaur also in the districts of Kullu, Shimla and Sirmaur, where it is known as *hirnyatar*.

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# 9

## POPULAR HANDICRAFTS

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Kinnaur has been traditionally the home for numerous handicrafts of great exotic charm. These handicrafts have earned worldwide acclaim. The Kinnauri shawl has been the cynosure of all the visitors to Kinnaur, especially the European visitors have showered all praise for its warmth, softness and artistry. Besides, the Kinnauri woollen *pattee* and many other woven products carry the similar reputation. The Kinnauri *Orases* have been very dextrous woodcarvers and so have been the traditional metalworkers. Some of them have perfected the art of image-making and have earned coveted distinction in that skill. We shall be reviewing these handicrafts in the following pages.

Unfortunately, the traditional value-system that nourished and sustained those handicrafts through ages is being pitifully ignored by the agencies in the guise of encouraging the handicrafts. The pernicious effect of such encouragement is now strikingly visible. Even the traditional craftsmen are being tempted to produce sub-standard stuff in bulk to meet the market demand. The irony is that no genuine handicraft item can be produced in bulk by the traditional methods to meet the ever-expanding market demand. Even so, being oblivious of the traditional nuances, those championing the cause of handicrafts are obsessed by the market potential of these 'novelties' and they are all out to turn those objects as high-priced saleable commodities. Thus, for the locals, who sustained these handicrafts for ages, these have become scarce

and unaffordable. On the other hand, the craftsmen, preempted by the stakeholders, are producing fake and substandard stuff to meet the market demand.

Therefore, there is a dire need to reorient our priorities to revive and encourage the traditional value-system among the craftsmen and to redefine our market concerns accordingly lest authenticity of these handicrafts should succumb to the market culture. Efforts are already underway to secure geographical indication (GI) for the Kinnauri *loi* (shawl) under the Geographical Indication Act (GIA). How far, it will ensure authenticity to the traditional art of weaving and protection to the traditional weavers in the remote villages of Kinnaur, is highly uncertain, for the consumer market has high stakes in the traditional handicrafts of this region. If the experience of Kullu shawl, registered as GI in 2006<sup>1</sup> is an indicator, the going may be far more difficult for the Kinnauri shawl.

#### WEAVING

Goat and sheep herding has been one of the main traditional occupations of the people of Kinnaur, as has already been noted. The quality of wool obtained from the Kinnauri flocks has been known as *byangi*. While most of it was obtained from the Kinnauri flocks, the finest quality of it was also imported from the 'Chinese Tartary' in earlier times. Although, no such import is now available, yet the fleece obtained from the undercoat of the Kinnauri lamb, locally called *chigoo* or *chikoo*, produces wool much superior to *byangi*. That wool is known as *imboo*. Obviously, fine quality wool has been amply available to the people. The ample availability of fine quality wool and the necessity of woollen clothes for most part of the year have been responsible for the development of domestic and non-domestic wood-based vocations in Kinnaur, where the people have been pursuing it as the part-time and whole-time works to produce various types of woollen items.

Most of the households in Kinnaur have their own indigenous frame-loom, called *tack-pra* (*tack* means to weave and *pra* means the wooden structure made for it). Even if a family did not possess one, the yarn prepared by the family was given to a professional village *tack-chya* (weaver), who usually belonged to the *Chomang*



A Kinnauri weaver arranging threads on the loom.

community, on the traditional symbiotic system. However, that system has largely been replaced by the monetary system.

Of late various types of handloom have been introduced in Kinnaur, but the traditional *tack-chya* (weaver) prefer their indigenous *tack-pra* (frame-loom) for weaving, because not only the weavers find these convenient to handle, but also because these can be improvised by the *tack-chyas* themselves with little effort. Besides, the end product of the indigenous *tack-pra* is richer in colours, designs and warmth than that of the other looms. The indigenous *tack-pra* also offer better manoeuvrability to switch over to the new designs and create such exquisite and complex designs, which other looms find difficult to execute. Nevertheless, to increase production, various agencies are striving for improvement and modernisation in the traditional frame-loom, but the traditional *tack-chya* have been averse to those efforts. Nevertheless, several non-household weaving units equipped with modernised looms have come up at many places, where there was no weaving activity earlier, such as Chini, Sangla, Nichar, etc. to cater to the burgeoning tourist market.

The villages of Sannam and Kanam have been traditionally known for the woollen products. In fact these villages had been producing thick, white and fleecy *gudamas* or *dumkhars* of the finest quality, but the village Sannam had an edge over Kanam. Sannam was also known for its beautiful maidens, as the saying goes:

*"Sacha demo Kanam, Banthin chias Sunnam."*

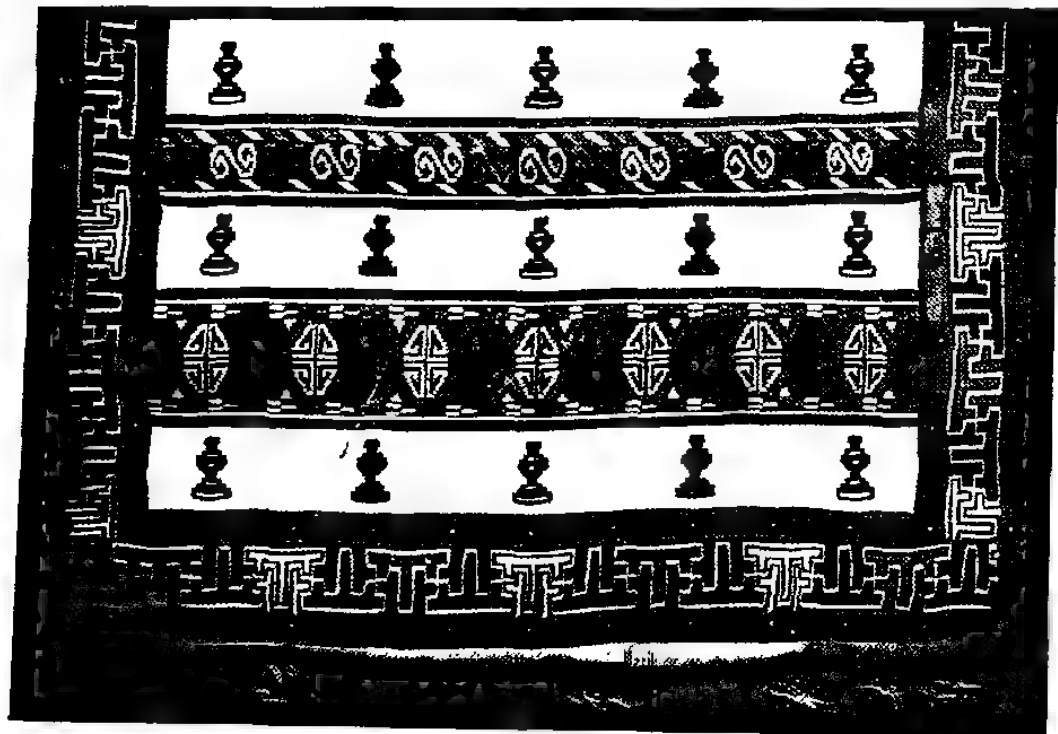
That is:

The land is fertile of Kanam,  
The maidens are charming at Sannam.

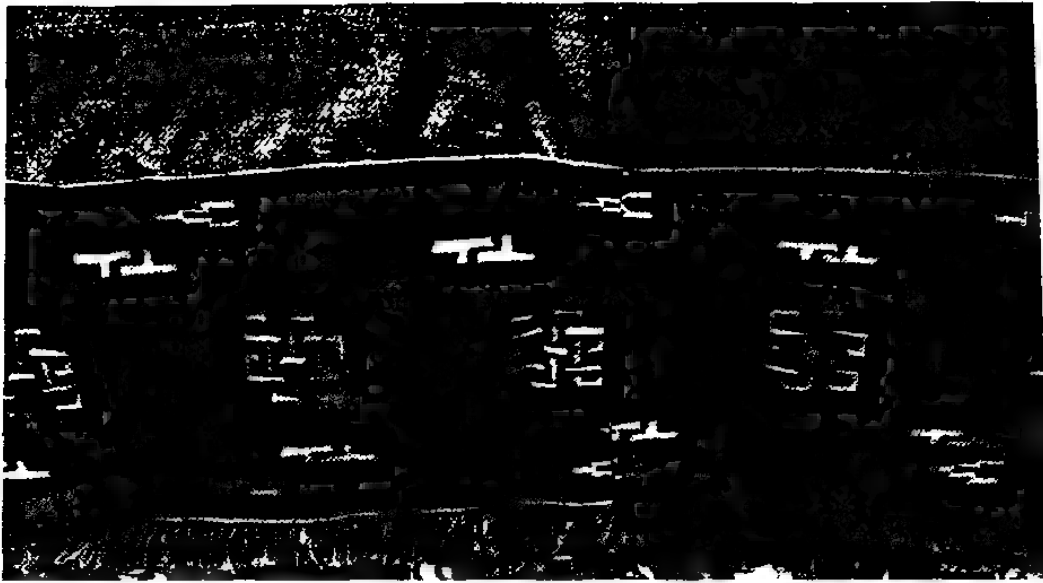
That proverb aside, Kinnaur has remained widely famous for its quality woollen products, such as the *loi*, *pattu*, *gachi*, *guluband*, *kbambroodar* fabric, *pattee*, *dohru*, *gudma*, *kharcha*, *chuktu*, *chugdan*, colourful woollen socks, caps, etc. Not only the professional *tackchya* (weaver), but all the men and women engage themselves in spinning and weaving during the winter months to make woollen items for their family use. Here we will discuss some of the important ones.

### *The Loi*

The Kinnauri *loi*, from which the Lavi Fair of Rampur derives its name, was until recently known to the outside world as the *Rampuri chaddar*, because they knew about that exotic novelty of Kinnaur only from the Lavi Fair at Rampur. Nevertheless, the



Colourful Kinnauri weaving designs.



A typical Kinnauri shawl.

Kinnauri *loi* (shawl) has been widely famous for its silky smoothness, warmth and colourful geometrical designs. Not only the fabric of these *loi* (shawls) is very fine and smooth, but also the design executed on them in very soft and of the pleasing pastel shades of reds, yellows and blues, bringing about a very rich and warm overall pleasing ochre effect. Very intricate geometrical designs, consisting of hexagons (*gyatongor tank*) and squares (*palpe*), etc. are juxtaposed in the stylized manner with the Buddhist devices, such as the *chhabehin*, *chbokin*, *dorje*, *gau*, *khabatibi*, *tar shul*, *tapru*, *yung-rung*, etc. on the borders, ends and the mainfield of the shawls. The overall effect of the nostalgic ochre is so profuse that it overwhelms the senses.

The preponderance of Buddhist symbols as the decorative devices on Kinnauri shawls may instinctively inspire one to look beyond the visual patterns to something spiritual. The Kinnauri shawls have a profound religious significance. The Buddhist symbols executed in five primary colours – white, yellow, red, green and blue – represent five elements, viz. air, earth, fire, water and ether. Overall effect of the ochre may signify blending of spirituality, truth and transcendental wisdom to represent a mystic spiritual core. Thus, the use with these colours on the Kinnauri shawl is more an exposition of the mystic *mandal* than a visual decoration. On it, the spirit of Bodhisattvas pervades.



### The Gachi

The *gachi* or *gachang* is among the oldest woollen fabric and the most essential wear not only of the people of Kinnaur but also of all the indigenous mountainous communities of Western Himalayan region. Worn round the waist as *kamarband* or waistband by the men and women alike, *gachi* is a very functional outfit that not only keeps the people fit and erect even with a heavy load on their back on the steep mountain ascent, but it also provides space



*Gachi and khambroodar pyjama.*

in its numerous folds for inserting *darat* (a type of long-handled sickle) and other items of use. The *gachi* is as sanctimonious for the people as *dhoti* is to the Brahmin priests in the mainland. It is essential that one should have a *gachi* round his waist before he is permitted into a temple, specially in lower Kinnaur & other places in the interiors. The *gachi* is a narrow woollen or *pashmina* fabric of not more than 30 centimetres width. It is sometimes double folded, but it is long enough to be wrapped round the waist four or five times. Thus, the length of a *gachi* is around five to six metres. The ends of *gachi* are ornamented with colourful patterns, identical to the one found on the shawls.

### The Guluband

The *guluband* (muffler) is perhaps the latest introduction in a wide and colourful array of the woollen fabrics of Kinnaur. Possibly, it found way to Kinnaur from Kullu, where the people have been

manufacturing it commercially for the tourists. In fact, it had never been a traditional wear of the people of this region. Even the word '*guluband*' seems alien to the local dialects. In the interiors of this region, where the ice-cold winds blow, not only the face or throat, but the entire body is required to be muffled, for which only *pattu*, and not a muffler, is needed. Therefore, use of muffler here is more a fashionable outfit than a part of normal costume.

The *guluband* is essentially a commercial item for the tourists. The weavers make these from *pashmina*, wool and *refffal* yarn in a wide range of variety to cater to the tourist market. Normally, it is a woven piece of fabric measuring about 30 centimetres in width and about 1.50 metres in length. These are plain as well as ornamented, sometimes treated with patchwork. The patchwork on mufflers is generally similar to that of the shawls. Since a muffler is essentially a fashion fabric, its ending portions are decorated tastefully to attract customers.

### *Khambroodar Fabric*

A special type of woollen fabric is woven in Kinnaur and the interiors of Shimla district. The people use *khambroodar* fabric to make a special type of pyjama, known as *khambroodar* pyjama, but actually it is a gaiter. It is a patterned fabric, prepared from fine woollen or *pashmina* yarn. Cloth for this pyjama is specially woven to a standard measure of 3.50 metres in length and about half a metre in width. About 30 to 50 centimetres wide portion at each end of this cloth is profusely ornamented with various coloured patterns, quite similar to the ones found on the Kinnauri shawls. This ornamented portion forms the lower part of the pyjama below the knees, so that it is visible to others. *Khambroodar* pyjama worn by the folk dancers, lends extra grace to their rhythmic movements.

### *The Pattee*

The *pattee* is a home-made woollen coating material of narrow width of one *hath*, which corresponds to less than half a metre width. In length, it is seven *hath*, i.e., about three metres, which is a standard one coat-length. While the width of a *pattee* remains fixed at one *hath*, it can be as long as four times the standard coat-

length. In Kinnaur, a *pattee* is woven in the twill weave as well as in the close-warp spacing. Generally, the woollen yarn used to manufacture a *pattee* is *khudrang*, i.e., monochromatic in its natural colour. *Pattees* of different colours and designs are manufactured in Kullu area also, but the grey *pattee* of Kinnaur is considered the best for its fine texture, grace, smoothness, warmth and durability.

### *The Gudma*

The *gudma* is a large-sized thick woollen sheet, very warm and soft, used as a covering on the bed. It is normally 1.50 metres in width and 4 metres in length so that it can be double folded to wrap the whole body. The fabric is woven in twill weave, but the weaving texture becomes completely invisible under the raised fibres of wool. On brushing these fibres, the fabric gives an appearance of fur. Mostly the yarn used for making a *gudma* is black or white. However, sometime stripes of red colour are also added on the borders. A long loosely twisted woollen rope-like chord is stitched to it along the selvedge to add strength to the fabric. *Gudmas* are generally manufactured in upper Kinnaur and the neighbouring Spiti.

### *Kinnauri Cap*

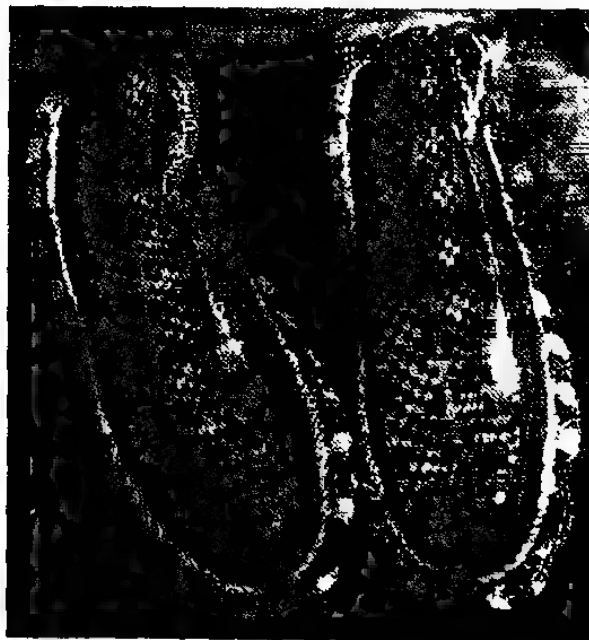
One of the distinct types of the Pahari caps (Kulluvi, Kinnauri, Bushahri and Lahuli) the Kinnauri cap is not only the traditional wear of the Kinnauras, but it has lately become a marketable commodity also. In fact, for the several immigrant tailors at various places in Kinnaur, it has become a whole-time business. The Kinnauri caps are distinguished from the other caps of its genre by the form of its lappet and the manner in which it is worn. The peculiarity of Kinnauri cap is that, like the Bushahri cap, it transgresses sex distinction and is worn by the males and females alike. The Kinnauri and Bushahri caps are just identical, but for the colour of stripe on the lappet. In the traditional Bushahri cap, the lappet is adorned with a stripe of velvet or *shanil* of parrot green colour. In the Kinnauri cap, the lappet carries a velvet or *shanil* stripe of deep red or crimson colour.

Some writers assert that "Schreve, a Moravian missionary intro-

duced a handloom from Europe towards the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century and taught the people of Kinnaur to make blankets."<sup>2</sup> Nothing can be so absurd than this statement. No doubt, the Moravian missionaries improved upon many traditional methods of weaving and knitting. They even introduced better way of room heating and cooking, but that should not be over-emphasised to suggest that prior to them, the people were living savagely. The people of Kinnaur, and rest of the trans-Himalayan region, living symbiotically with the nature, had been leading a very contented and cozy life from the earliest times, which fact is well established not only from the ancient murals in the monasteries and numerous material evidences, but also from the classical texts and the accounts of several European travellers.<sup>3</sup>

### *Kinnauri Footwear*

The traditional Kinnauri footwear having richly embroidered woollen upper is known as *takose-chukh* and the one without embroidery is called *chukh*. The *gunspona* has been a commonly used footwear, made of wool and goat hair. The sole is made of goatskin. Over the sole, the upper of shoe is woven with goat hair, with a border of black and white wool. Some *gunspona* are embroidered in multicolour and are called *tapru-se baldanuspona*.



A pair of *takose-chukh* – the embroidered Kinnauri woollen footwear.

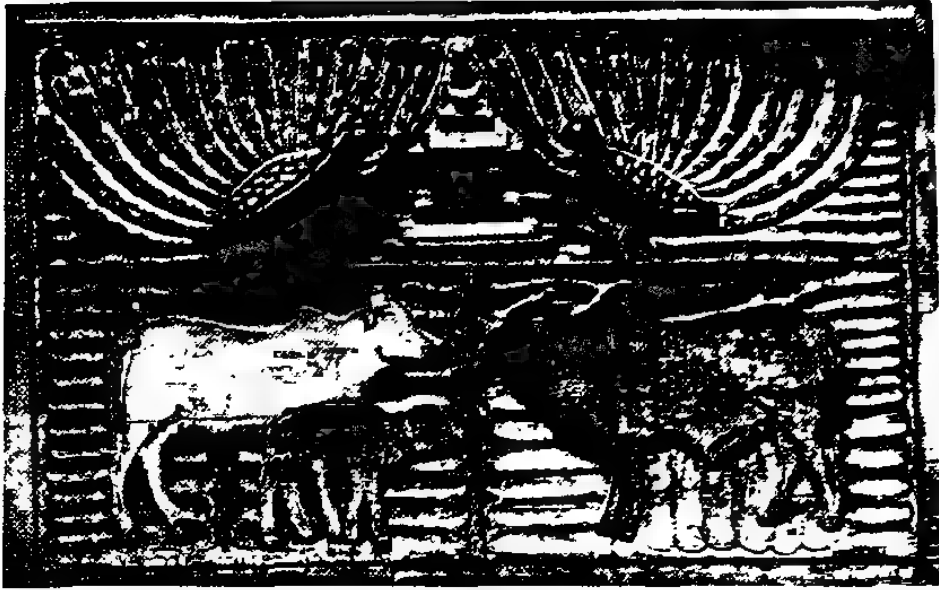
## WOODCARVING

If one wants see how profusely the traditional temples and houses of the Western Himalayan interior are treated with the artistic woodwork, one is advised to visit Kinnaur, especially its lower part, where one can find excellent woodcarving work not only in the old houses and temples, but in the newly-built houses as well. It is still a very vibrant and living tradition among the people. In fact, with the changing conditions, the art of woodcarving in Kinnaur has been changing its stylistic and thematic format to remain relevant and contemporary. Thus, not only a harmonious blend of traditional, Buddhist, Brahmanical devices is seen in the woodcarving, but even Muslim and several secular motifs and themes may also be seen in it.

The professional community of woodcarvers form an integral part of the Kinnauri social setup, without any stigmatic distinction, but they normally belong to the non-*Khoshia* indigenous professional community – the *Beru* that constitutes the lower strata of Kinnauri society. There is no separate identity for the woodworkers, but any expert woodworker is normally supposed to be skilled in handling stone and metals as well. The proficient hereditary woodworkers are known as the *Orases*, and they are much respected. There is no dearth of expert *Orases* in Kinnaur. They are



A carved wooden panel, village Urni.

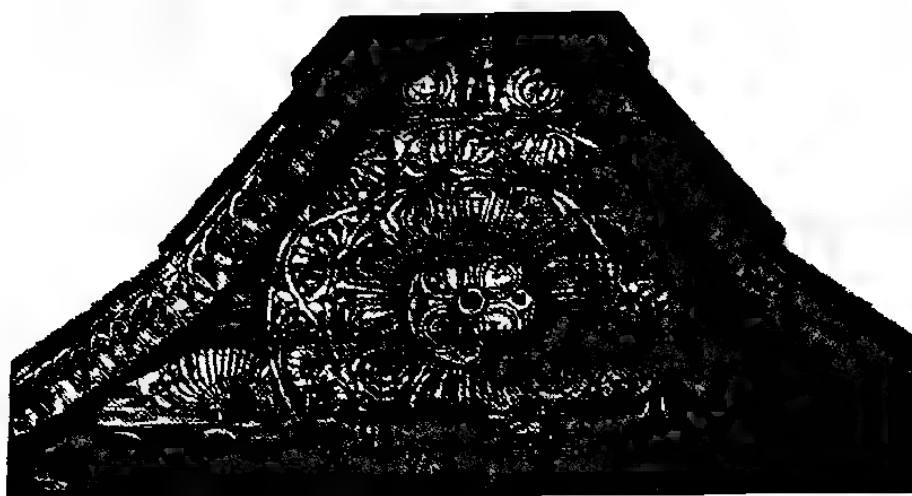


Buddhist and Brahmanical carving on a panel, village Urni.

widely spread in different villages of Kinnaur. I met two *Orases*, Budhi Ram and Dharm Chand from village Nasing, a remote village of Kinnaur known for its quality liquor, recently at Shimla. They were engaged by the State Museum, Shimla for decorating a gallery with the traditional Kinnaur woodcarving.

The *Orases* have their concentration in the lower part of Kinnaur in the villages of Sapni, Batsari, Shong, Nichar, Sungra, Bari, Bhaba, etc., where wood still forms a staple building construction material. In lower Kinnaur, one may find every exposed part of a temple or house richly carved and engraved, but the quality of woodcarving here is much inferior, being superficial and flat, lacking technical skill and depth.

The hereditary artisans rarely use modern tools, but rely on the local improvisation. Even earlier, the *Orases* did not use handsaw; and lathe is still unknown to them. For that reason, no round decorative posts etc. are found here. These are either of octagonal or hexagonal sections. The tools that the *Orases* have been using traditionally, include *goli yan*, *seedha yan*, *teda yan*, *golai yan*, *koganta yan* (all chisels of different shapes), *takora* (file), *khees* (a small wooden hammer), *shingoo* (mallet), *bashing* (adze), etc. Though the woodcarving in the temples and houses in the lower parts of Kinnaur is very profuse, it gives an impression of etching or engraving rather than of carving. However, one may encounter pleasant



Wooden caving under the gable of the *Narains & Nagin* temple at Chini.

surprises also, for in some temples, graceful three-dimensional carving with undercuts and very immaculately carved and manicured architectural sculptures may also be found, which are rare elsewhere in the Himalayan region.

During one of my field visits, I once found some very ancient wooden panels carved in the classical style in the ancient castle-palace of Guge Rani at Sapni (called *Da-pang* in local dialect). The inner portion of that building had some original carved wooden pillars and wall-panels. The anthropomorphic and floral carvings executed with the fluent and deep chiselling and dextrous modelling, reminisced the classical mannerism of carving in the ancient stone temples. Those relics were lost due to the natural process of decaying and human callousness. Thus, when I visited Sapni second time, nothing was to be found except the tradition. Lately, many carved wooden members of the structure of Guge Rani's palace were destroyed, when this building was converted into a primary school. Nevertheless, there are still a few left to unfold a bit of its past glory. The people of Sapni have also recently built a richly-carved wooden temple for *Piri Nag* in the village.

I happened to find a good number of structural woodcarvings in the residential houses of the people, especially in the windows, at various villages, such as at Urni, Rogi, Kothi, Kamru, Chhitkul, etc. The sacred Buddhist motifs are so beautifully and harmoniously juxtaposed with intricate floral devices that these appear to be the magnificent pieces of artwork. Among the traditional

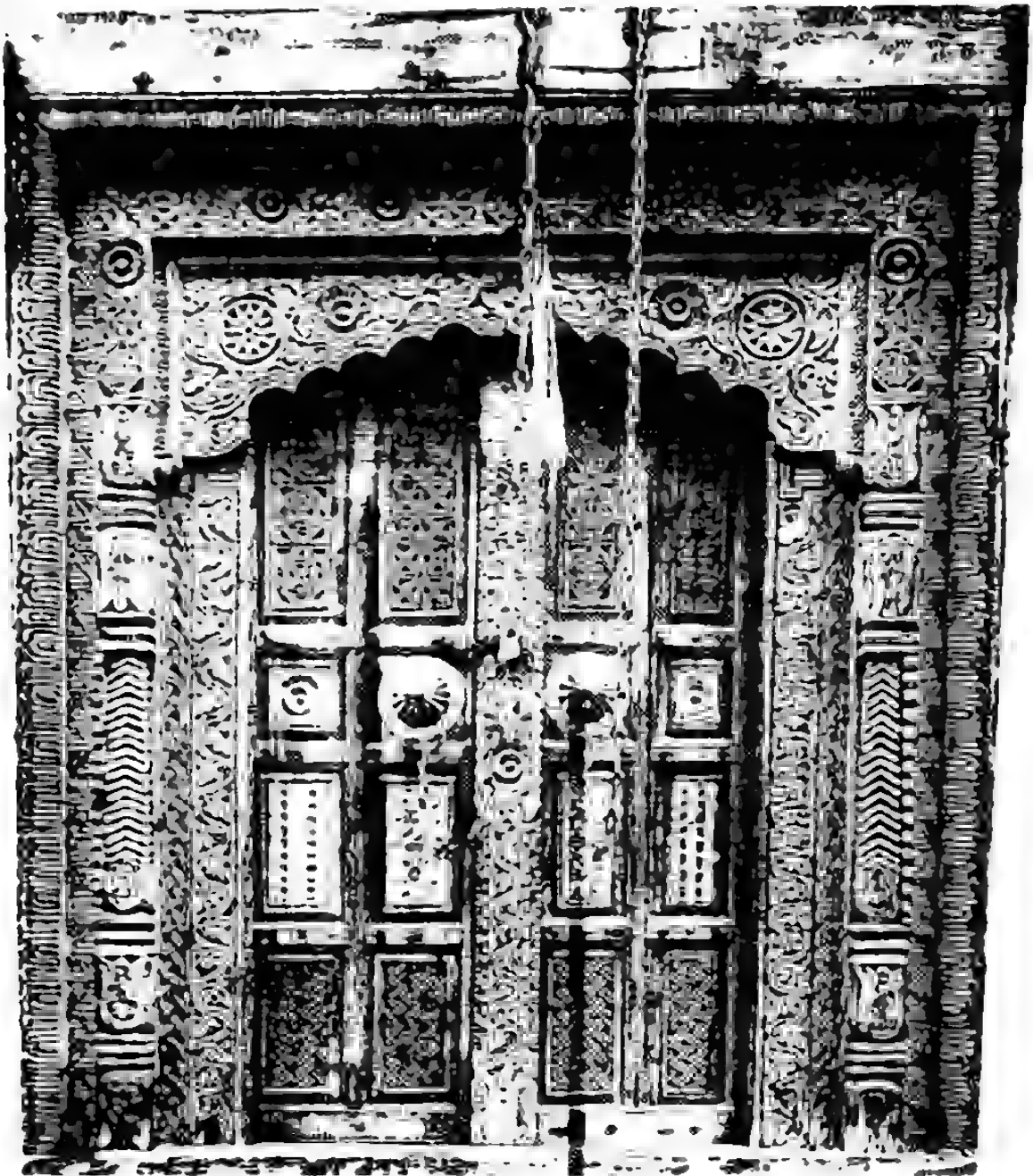


Carved leonine heads of the plinth beams of the temple at Rogi.

popular designs, *panma metk* (complex floral design), *duk* (an elaborate dragon), *khoro* (a stylised circular Buddhist device), *zipta* (a demonic frontal face), etc. are the notable ones. How skilled the *Orases* of this area are, may best be adjudged from these deeply and artistically carved window panels. These woodcarvings are purely indigenous, with hardly any extraneous influence discernible on them. However, besides these authentic Buddhist devices, faunal woodcarving may also be seen in some of the panels. For instance, the peacocks pecking grains from the pots may be seen in some of the window panels at village Rogi. Peacocks are not found in Kinnaur, but the carver has imagined the peacock as *monal* (the most beautiful and rare pheasant of the Himalayan interiors). In some of the carved wooden panels at village Urni, complex Buddhist *mandal* diagrams may be found carved. The owner has painted these panels with the sacred Buddhist colours.

However, in some other window panels of the residential houses at many villages, especially at village Urni, I found many unconventional themes. For instance, I found a dancing human figure, similar to the Launkara of Shimla area on a vertical wooden plank in one house at Chhitkul, deep in Sangla valley. Among many such unconventional types, there are some that reflect on how the themes of woodcarving have been evolving under the

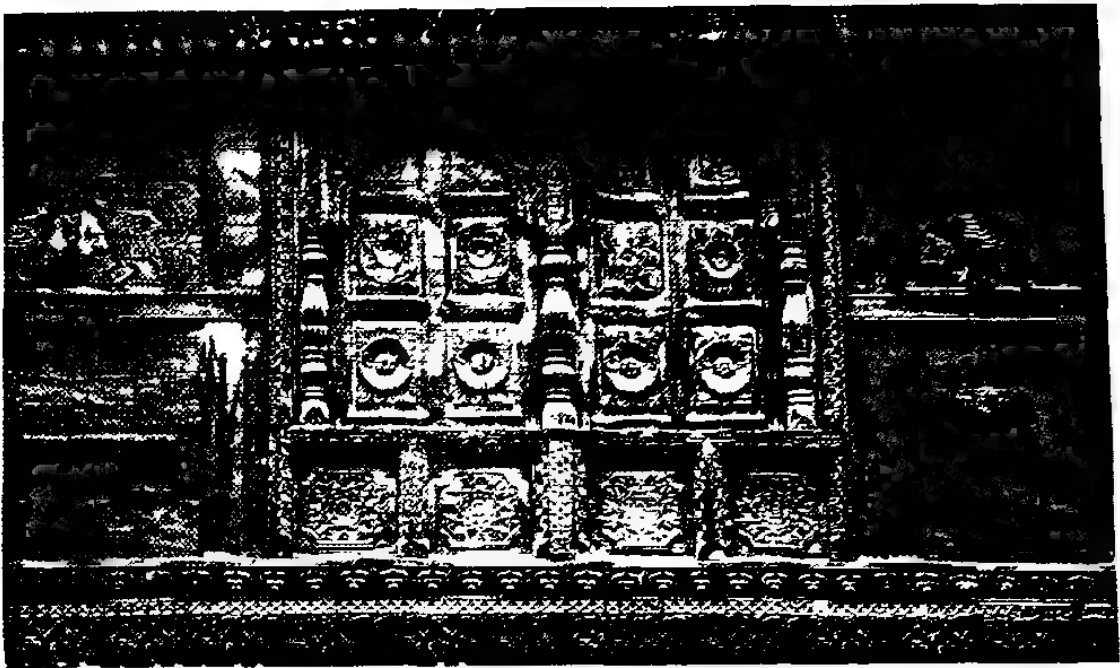




Woodcarving done by the *Orases* of Kinnaur at Bhimakali temple, Sarahan.

changing socio-cultural scenario. For instance, in one panel, four-armed Shiva is 'etched' in meditation. Behind him, forepart of Nandi is seen towards right. Entire treatment is so flat and so well outlined with the etched lines that it may easily be defined as a painting in relief, and so flat and well outlined are the other panels. In one interesting panel, a scene of group dance is enacted, with the male and female dancers forming a chain by knotting their arms. The leader of the team, *dhure*, is seen holding a flywhisk.

The stylistic influence of Kinnauri woodcarving has extended



Carved window-panels of a house at Rogi.

down in the Satluj valley up to Rampur, where interesting wood-carving may be seen in some of the old houses. The Bhimakali temple and the old palace of Bushahr kings at Sarahan are the good examples of that remarkable development. The diffused but widely spread influence of the Kinnauri diction may also be noticed in the head-reaches of Pabbar valley in Rohru tehsil of Shimla district. However, despite the thematic identity with the woodcarving of Kinnaur, the carving in that area, although profuse, lacks the Kinnauri refinement and cultivation.

### METAL WORK

Nothing is precisely known about the origin of metal-based handicrafts in Kinnaur. However, it may safely be assumed that the people might have been meeting the requirement of metallic tools and implements by import. Possibly, the people had also been making the face-images of their deities by the repousse (sheet-pressing) technique. Traditional evidences indicate that the handicraft of manufacturing sophisticated metallic objects by solid and hollow casing for making images was introduced in Kinnaur from Tibet by the skilled artisans with the advent of Buddhism.<sup>4</sup> The atmosphere surcharged with the religious feelings had been the



Sheet-pressed image of Ganesh done by a metalworker of Kinnaur.

main driving force for the development of this handicraft. Under that influence, the iconographic principles for preparing the plastic images have been in no way different from those prescribed for the two-dimensional visual representations. According to the Buddhist monastic canons, a plastic image is a picture projected in depth so that the circumference of a plastic image measures three times the width of the painted one. With that mindset, the traditional image-makers of Kinnaur, and elsewhere in the trans-Himalayan region, have never been able to achieve as much artistic excellence in the plastic images. Image-making in plastic mediums involves greater technical skill, which the deeply religious lay artisans of Kinnaur and the Buddhist trans-Western Himalayan region have rarely been able to achieve.

The most common method of metal casting in Kinnaur (as elsewhere in its neighbourhood) has been the *cire-perdue* or the lost-wax process. This technique offers two alternatives: (i) the hollow casting and (ii) the solid casting.

For the hollow casting, an image is very carefully shaped in bee-wax, very thinly spread over the clay-core. When all the desired details have been developed on the wax, it is covered with



Ornamental sheet-pressed work done by a metalworker of Kinnaur.

the successive layers of clay. To ensure that, the inner clay-core is not displaced from its position when the wax is heated and removed, clay 'pegs' are inserted in the clay-core at various points. The 'job' is then left to dry in the shade. After it is completely dried, it is gently heated to extract the wax through the holes left for that purpose in the outer clay-shell at the top end of the 'job'. Thereafter, the cavity so created is carefully filled with the molten brass, bronze or any other metal by keeping the 'job' upside down so that the metal flows from the base towards the head. It is then left to cool. The shell is then broken and the core removed.

In case of the solid casting, the figure is entirely made of bee-wax without any clay-core so that, when the bee-wax is extracted from the 'job', the shell is completely hollow. The remaining operation is similar to the hollow casting. At times, the vital parts, like hands, face, etc. are cast separately and jointed to the main body afterwards.

At times, *repousse* or the sheet-pressing method is also adopted

to prepare figures. However, this method is mostly employed to prepare pedestals for the images. Repousse is the most common technique used for making the face-images of local deities, musical instruments, sacramental artefacts, utensils, etc. In this process, a metal sheet of gold, silver, copper or brass is cut to a size. On it the figure or design is drawn and carved on the reverse side. Then turning the sheet over, the sheet is placed on the especially prepared 'pitch', called *lakh*. The figure or design is then sharpened by hammering the sheet with scribes, punches and impression pens. For preparing the 'pitch', a mixture of resin or *ral* powder, *geru* or ash of cow-dung and oil is mixed in definite proportion and heated, depending upon the required hardness of 'pitch'.

Kinnaur has a coveted distinction of having some of finest traditional metalworkers, proficient in the repousse work. Most of them belong to lower Kinnaur area. The silver-plated doors of the right side tower of the Bhimakali temple at Sarahan is one of the finest repousse work in this region, done by the artisans of lower Kinnaur during the kingship of Shamsheer Singh (1850-1914 CE) of the Bushahr state. During the reign of his successor, Raja Padam Singh (1914-1947 AD), some artisans of lower Kinnaur embellished many other doors in that temple-complex with repousse work in silver, inlaid with gold, depicting various Hindu gods and goddesses. Accomplished traditional silversmiths (called *sunaras*) are still active in the lower Kinnaur area. I had the opportunity of observing a team of the accomplished silversmiths working in Bhimakali temple-complex a few years ago. Those included Ramdas, Dharm-sukh, Ramjiddass and Dhanraj of Kothi village in Kinnaur and Pyre Lal, Daulat Ram, Mukand Lal and Ganga Ram of Deothi village in Rampur. It was a pleasant revelation for me to know from them that the smiths of this region, as elsewhere in the Western Himalayan region, observe certain taboos while making metallic face-images by sheet pressing or metal casting. There is, however, no such taboo in the making of musical instruments or other objects of use in the temple.

The metal images so prepared are then gilded. For that operation, different techniques have been in use, ranging from the lacquer fixing to amalgam technique. In the lacquer fixing technique, a micro-thin layer of gold leaf is applied over the metallic

surface that has already been given a very thin coating of the red lacquer. The gold leaf sticks to the metal surface giving a rich effect of shining gold. Wooden images have also been given a 'golden touch' by this technique. However, that practice is rare. Of late, the chemical method of gilding has become popular. Under this technique, the image is first treated in nitric acid and then warmed and rubbed over with mercury. This treatment produces an amalgam, over which a thin gold leaf is spread and the image subjected to high temperature that permanently fixes the gold layer to the base. The piece is then polished and finished to give a bright effect.

No image can be considered worthy of worship unless it is enlivened through an elaborate soul-infusing ritual. For that purpose, the *panch-ratn* (five noble metals), consecrated grains of rice, the scroll containing the sacred formulae, etc. are placed inside the icon through an opening left for that purpose at the base of the icon. The whole operation has to be accomplished under the supervision of an accomplished lama. This opening is called the *zun-zhug*, i.e., the entrance or the charm-place. Thereafter, the *zun-zhug* is firmly closed by welding a metal sheet over it. After that, the image is worthy of being installed on the altar. It has become refulgent and live.

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# 10

## HABITATIONAL PATTERN

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### VILLAGE SETTING

The bioclimatic and biophysical conditions have been the most decisive factors that have influenced the habitalional pattern of villages in Kinnaur district. Most of the geographical area of this district, being highly rugged, barren and above the permanent snowline, is uninhabitable. Therefore, the habitalional area does not exceed more than thirteen kilometres on both sides of Satluj and its tributaries. The main Satluj valley is a veritable treacherous gorge, with very steep and rocky banks. At many places, the banks are simply vertical and even with undercuts. Therefore, it offered least opportunity for the villages to develop on its banks, with very few exceptions. However, given to the topography of area, one may find considerably large villages located on its both banks higher up on the mountain slopes, where reasonably level stretches are available, with ample supply of water easily available from the snow-fed rills and other necessities from the forests. The houses are so closely located along the contours that these look like clusters. The dispersed formation of houses is rare in this region, especially in the traditional villages. Most of these villages are connected by the fabled (but now almost abandoned) Hindustan-Tibet road. However, after the construction of all-weather motorable National Highway No. 22 down in the gorge close to the Satluj, many new roadside shanty villages have sprung up closer to the

river. Bhabanagar, Wangtu, Tapari, Poari are some of such settlements. Besides, many traditional villages have also spilled over downwards to the road edge. Spillo, Kanam, Poo, Maling, etc. are some of them.

However, the side valleys formed by numerous tributaries of Satluj – the Spiti, Ropa, Taiti, Kashang, Wangar and Shorang on its right bank, and the Titang, Gymthing, Tidong, Baspa and Solding on its left – are quite open. Therefore, these side valleys offer better possibilities for the village settlements of sizeable villages on their banks.

Possibly, different communities might have been settling here at different places in separate clusters during different periods. Those clusters developed into the disorganised larger settlements in the course of time. The conglomerates of those settlements were defined as the 'revenue' villages. Thus, the general pattern of the present-day villages in Kinnaur represents a haphazard and confused clustered arrangement of houses in different stratified hamlets

The general equation of calculating the density of population and geographical area bases is deceptive and completely irrelevant to Kinnaur, as has been noted in the 4<sup>th</sup> chapter. Because, the villages are located on the habitable patches only closer to the rivers or of the mountain spurs in the linear pattern that occupy only a fraction of the total geographical area that is completely inhabitable wild waste. If such calculation is narrowed down to the village population and 'usable area' equation, the results may be radically different. However, here we have relied on the tehsil or sub-tehsil-based data for the comparative study.

### *Trans-Himalayan Upper Kinnaur*

Of the six tehsils and sub-tehsils of Kinnaur district, three – the Hangrang sub-tehsil, Poo tehsil and Moorang tehsil – are located in the scarcity-ridden trans-Himalayan cold desert, having rugged and mountainous topography. The villages in this trans-Himalayan upper Kinnaur are located closer to the Spiti and Satluj rivers on their both banks on different higher stretches and in the side valley formed by the tributaries of these rivers. These valleys are





Kafaur, the first village of Kinnaur. Once it was an all-wood village.

rather open and the villages are located nearer to them. Although, the houses in these villages are located in small oasis on level stretches on different contours, yet these are so closely located that these give an impression of the clustered formation amongst the poplar and juniper groves. The houses face the valley side. These are generally the double-storeyed structure and functionally or structurally are closer to the Spitian houses.

The northeastern-most Hangrang sub-tehsil, spread on both sides of Spiti river, is the most populated administrative unit of Kinnaur district, with density of population at 56 persons per square kilometre. However, all the 15 inhabited villages of this sub-tehsil are located relatively closer to the Spiti river on its both banks on different higher stretches. On an average, 271 persons live in each village. Nako is the most scenic village of this area. The houses in this village are located at different levels around a lake that provides a most beautiful setting for this village.

Similarly, all the 27 inhabited villages of Poo tehsil are located on the side slopes of Satluj river and in the wide and open valley of Ropa Khad, sparing a vast wild wasteland on higher reaches. Thus, the density of population is here as low as 7.73 persons per



Lakeside village Nako.

square kilometre and the average population per village as 293 persons.

The 38 inhabited villages of Moorang tehsil are located on the slopes of Satluj river on higher levels and in the side valley of its three tributaries. The density of population of this tehsil is 6.38 persons per square kilometre and the average population of each village comes to 273 persons.

#### *Sub-Temperate Lower Kinnaur*

Coming down to the lower Kinnaur, comprising three tehsils – Kalpa, Sangla and Nichar – the geophysical and bio-climatic scenario changes significantly. The mountainous formation becomes highly rugged, rocky, and steep, but looks greener with the sub-temperate variety of verdure. Due to steep mountain profile of both sides of Satluj, the villages are located safely higher up on secure mountain slopes, where relatively level stretches are available and there is ample and perennial supply of water from the snow-fed streams for drinking, irrigation and running of watermills. Since, dense forests of deodar, birch, *tosh*, *chilgoza*, etc. are available here, people rarely develop groves around their houses. Most of their needs are met from the trees around the houses and the nearby forests. Since the mountain slope here is steeper, the houses are built on the terraces in linear formation by constructing the retaining walls. These are reasonably spaced apart to form enough gaps for the passageway in between. Nevertheless, the villages here also represent a conglomerate of clustered formation of houses, though there is now a tendency among the people to construct houses in isolated locations among their apple orchards. Such widely dispersed orchard-houses now coming up at many places in lower Kinnaur, which not only signify the horticulture-based prosperity, but a feeling of social security as well. Like the houses in trans-Himalayan Kinnaur, the houses in lower Kinnaur also face the valley side, but these are without exception double storeyed or more. Constructing multi-storeyed houses is not only a functional necessity here, but it is a physical compulsion also. The ground floors here are used as barn and for tethering so that the animals are well protected and the warmth generated by



The grinding wheels of the watermill.



Gushing water from a watermill.

them may keep the upper floor warm and comfortable for the inmates. Because of the steepness of mountain slope, level ground for constructing a house is not only rare, but also costly to develop. Therefore, multi-storey houses are preferred.

The headquarters of Kinnaur district are located at Reckong Peo in Kalpa tehsil. That makes it the most thickly populated tehsil of the district, with density of population being 45.10 persons per square kilometre, and having 17,630 persons living in 38 inhabited villages, spread in a geographical area of 390.90 square kilometres. Thus, the average population per village comes to 464 persons. Obviously, the average size of villages in this tehsil is the largest. Extraneous influences in the choice of material, construction technique, architectural style is strikingly visible in this tehsil. Not only the traditional style of construction and architecture has been a casualty of that pernicious influence, but the traditional hereditary *Orases* have also been completely marginalised by the Bihari artisans, expert in the plywood culture.

The Sangla tehsil, drained by the Baspa river, is the most beautiful valley of Kinnaur, and for that reason, it is the most favourite haunt for the tourists. The habitation patches in this tehsil are concentrated on both banks of Baspa only in the lower reaches, where flatter stretches are available closer to the riverbank. Sizable villages exist there in clustered formation. The rest of its geographical area of 1,282.20 square kilometres is occupied by the forests and highland vegetation. For that reason, though the density of population here is quite low at 9.15, its concentration only in a very small area makes it the second largest in the district as far as the average population per village is concerned. In this tehsil, 11,731 persons live in 28 inhabited villages, which work out to an average of 419 persons per village.

The Nichar tehsil is the outer and lower-most tehsil of Kinnaur that largely borders on Shimla district. This is also the most rugged area, with high and rocky mountains abruptly sloping down to the Satluj. At places, the banks are simply vertical and with undercuts. Therefore, the villages are located in the linear formation higher up on the secure and flatter patches on its both the banks. However, the multi-storeyed houses are built on different built-up terraces in a clustered formation. Since, rearing cattle and goat and

sheep herding, with the precarious traditional agriculture, are the main occupations of the people here, the villages are ill kept, with filth-strewn and muddy lanes and paths.

The villages on the left bank of Satluj on the mountain slope facing north are surrounded by the thick deodar forests. These villages, having been connected by the fabled Hindustan-Tibet mule road, were easily accessible. Large caravans of muleteers and traders used to pass through these villages, carrying trans-Himalayan exotic commodities to the Indian marts and vice versa, offering opportunity for these villages to develop into large size. Thus, these are appreciably large as compared to the villages on the right bank. The mountain on the right, facing south is barest of forests, except in the inner folds, where shady and moist conditions exist. Only a few villages are perched here higher up on the rocky mountain face, where habitable patches exist. Bara Kamba and Chhota Kamba are the two noticeable villages on that side. Even these villages are accessible only by a precarious wild path, wide enough for foothold. The density of population of this tehsil works out to 22.52 persons per square kilometre, based on a geographical area of this tehsil at 1,182.60 square kilometres and the total population of 26,630 persons. There are 88 inhabited villages in this tehsil, and the average population per village comes to 303 persons.

### HOUSE TYPES IN UPPER KINNAUR

The houses in the trans-Himalayan upper Kinnaur may appear of large size from outside, but the actual usable floor area between the thick walls is lesser. The thickness of the rammed earth walls varies from 75 to 120 centimetres depending upon the orientation. The windward walls are normally thicker to serve as barriers against the chilling winter winds, but the leeward walls are relatively thinner. Nevertheless, these walls have to be strong enough to take the heavy superimposed loads. The inner walls are thinner, of 75 centimetres or less in thickness. These 'thinner' walls normally serve as partitions, but these have also to bear the superimposed load of the heavy mud flooring. Further, too many smaller rooms on each floor necessitate more internal walls, which also



A traditional house at Khwangi near Reckong Peo.

occupy considerable floor area. Thus, the walls consume most part of the covered area, leaving much reduced usable floor area.

Besides the structural and climatic constraints, the other factor responsible for the characteristic small size of the houses in this region is the predominant influence of the monastic clergy over public and family life. Under the customary monastic diktat that is fast waning away now, every family should pledge their eldest son to monkhood. However, that practice has been altered to the elder brother's advantage under the institution of primogeniture, where the eldest brother inherits all the property of a family and lives householder's life. Hence, he is known as *khang-chen-pa*, that is, 'the big householder.' Thus, while the eldest brother enjoys all the wealth, the younger ones are obliged to retire into the monasteries and remain celibate. After the elder brother is married, he also takes over the charge of ancestral house and land, relieving his father of the ancestral property. He then becomes *dak-po*, that is, 'the owner'. The old parents are obliged to retire to a small house, known as *khang-chung*, that is, 'the small house', generally adjacent to the *khang-chen*, 'the big house'. The *khang-chung* is the

permanent home of the old parents. Thus, in the ancestral house, only one small family of *khang-chen-pa* lives at a time.

In the trans-Himalayan upper Kinnaur, no building material except earth and the conglomerate deposits of shale, lime and sandstone are available. Situated in such an arid and windswept highland cold desert, the people build their houses against extreme natural odds, virtually with only earth: with no timber of any description available around. Any type of vegetation – roots, undergrowths, twigs, bushes and leaves – all are precious building materials that substitute wooden planks for flooring and roofing. For joists, beams and posts, people generally use skinned, but unhewn trunks of poplars and junipers. For that purpose, people grow their own poplar and juniper trees on their lands.

Under these precarious conditions, one can hardly think of the finer aspects of planning and designing a house. The only guiding criterion is the protection of inmates – human and animal – against natural odds and ample storage space for fodder, food and *chhang*. Therefore, hardly any consideration is possible for architectural



A traditional house at Rogi.



refinement and even for structural symmetry. It is rare to find a wall in reasonable plumb straightness. No wonder then, that even a wall of the upper storey may be resting on the fragile floor, without a wall underneath. Such structural anomalies are common in this part of Kinnaur.

The houses in this area are customarily double-storeyed structures, built in quadratic formation. These houses with flat exterior give a stark appearance of cubical. These usually have an open yard on one side. That open yard, called *nin-pa*, is used for tethering animals under the sun and during most of the summer months. The *tangra*, i.e., ground floor, is generally used for penning. However, this floor is also used for wintering by the inmates, for the proximity to the animals also lends comfortable warmth to the *gunsa* (large winter living room), wherein the *tandoor* (central fire) is always smouldering. One of the smaller and darker rooms is kept for storing *chhang* (home-made liquor of barley). The staple construction material in this area is earth, with rubble stone used only up to the plinth level. Most of the woodwork is of un-hewn trunks and branches of poplar, but the door and window frames are made of *kail* and pencil cedar. This wood is arranged from lower Kinnaur.

The trans-Himalayan houses of upper Kinnaur exhibit bustling activity. Standing atop the flat mud roof of a house, when one looks to the valley side, he may find the steep mountain slopes covered with houses. The roof of each of these is neatly piled with the dried brushwood and grass. The windows of the houses are small, and their shutters are painted in red and deep blue, but with no pretensions to aesthetics.

#### HOUSE TYPES IN MID-KINNAUR

Surrounded by snow-capped mountain ranges and the endless hues of green foliage cascading along the slopes, Kanam is a sizeable multi-community village of mid-Kinnaur, where one may feel the aridity of trans-Himalayan cold desert and the sub-temperate ambiance of lower Kinnaur blended. Situated on undulating and uneven plateau amidst the fruit trees of *chuli* (*Prunus armeniaca*), *akhrot* (walnut, *Juglans regia*), wild apricot, *bemi*

(*Prunus persica*), *muldug* (*Populus ciliata*), *palu* (sour apple), *chilgoza* (*Pinus gerardiana*), etc., the village is spread in three *abadis* (settlements), that is, upper Kanam, central Kanam and lower Kanam. These divisions appear to be arbitrary, for the village folks are unaware of such distinctions. Nevertheless, these three *abadis* represent the caste-based stratified configuration of the hamlets. The houses belonging to the Rajputs (obviously the Khash) are clustered separately on the highest terraces. The houses of *Domangs* (metal-smiths), *Orases* (woodworkers) and *Chomangs* (or Kolis) are clustered separately at lower levels on two sides of a ledge that descends abruptly and precipitously to the edge of Satluj. Thus, the village represents a stratified and disorganised clustered arrangement.

The first to settle at Kanam were probably the *Chomangs*. That assumption is affirmed by the fact that the *grokch* (oracle) of Dabala Devta, the presiding god of Kanam belongs to Deoti sub-clan of the *Chomangs*. The *Chomangs* call themselves Koli, but they also perform the job of leather workers or *Chamars*. Possibly, the Rajputs (Khash) also settled in the village simultaneously. They could assert their might to occupy the best piece of land for their houses at the highest location. They are known to have emigrated from Newar valley of Rohru (Shimla district) to Kanam. That connection is important to explain the existence of some of the Khash architectural peculiarities of Rohru area in this region. The influence of Rajputs on the *Chomangs* to occupy the highest terrace in the locality is evident from the fact that the *kardar* (the chief executive) of the presiding god of Kanam, Dabala Devta, is always from that community. The *Domangs* (metal-smiths) and *Orases* (woodworkers) are the artisans, who could not find acceptance among the Rajputs, but the artisans regarded themselves higher than the *Chomangs* on the social ladder. Therefore, they chose to settle separately. With the expansion of families in course of time, houses came to be built around the nucleus, forming different community-based clusters. Because of the shortage of space in the clusters, some of the households of the village spilled over from the parental localities to the peripheral locations.

The caste-based distinctions notwithstanding, the structural and functional pattern of residential houses in the village is identi-

cal. The only perceptible difference between the houses of different communities is their size, but that may also be due to economic rather than caste-based distinction. The residential houses of Kanam are structurally, architecturally and functionally the same as we find anywhere in mid-Kinnaur up to Poo. Beyond Poo, the geophysical scenario is entirely different and so is the architecture, which we have discussed a short while earlier.

The architecture of houses in mid-Kinnaur area represents a blend of wood-based architecture of lower Kinnaur and the mud-n-stone-based trans-Himalayan architecture. Thus, despite the use of wood in these houses, the overhanging verandas and sloping roofs are conspicuously missing. However, the stone-filled timber-bonded walls are meant only for the ground floor. All the upper storeys are entirely made of wood, including the flat roof. Thus, though it is largely a wood-based structure, yet it has a box-like flat cubical appearance. However, it is not as stark as the mud-n-stone-based trans-Himalayan architecture. These houses, built on different terraces one above the other, from a distance look like huge and gloomy boxes piled in a staggered formation one above the other.

Most of the houses in Kanam are south facing, possibly because the valley opens to that side and the sun remains in that direction for most of the day hours. Customarily, most of the houses are three storeyed. The ground floor is known as *bong*, the first floor is called *ghunsa panthang* and the second or uppermost floor is known as *thoring panthang*. The floors above the ground floor are collectively known as the *forting*. Generally, the *bong* or the ground floor is exclusively reserved for tethering livestock, as elsewhere, but here the inventory of livestock is not only different, but large also. It includes yaks, *dzoes*, *dzomoos* (crossbreeds of cow and yak), *goontths* (trans-Himalayan ponies), etc. Obviously, the accommodation for these animals has to be quite large and spacious. A small single shutter sturdy door, fitted in an equally massive doorframe in the middle is used to enter into the *bong*. One has to bend on one's knees to enter the room. Except that little door, there is no other opening in the *bong*. Consequently, it is pitch-dark inside. In front of the *bong*, a narrow open paved yard, defined by an elevated parapet, is left. This is a multipurpose open space in front of the

house, where the animals may be tethered in fair-weather conditions, people may congregate, and crops may be gathered and threshed.

In a larger house, a part of the *bong* may be used as *quim* (store), and a passage to accommodate a staircase to the upper floor may be provided. Above the *bong* is *ghunsa panthang*. Generally, the access to *ghunsa panthang* is provided externally from one side of the house through a wooden stair. The entrance to the rooms on the *ghunsa panthang* is provided from *ton-khang* – a projected narrow glazed veranda on the front and sides. That veranda also serves as a relaxing place for the family under the sun. During the winter months, *ghunsa panthang* is used as the living area for the entire household. The family lives in a single large room with little or no pretension to privacy. In the middle of that room, a raised large square platform is made for the central fireplace. On it, a *loadnang* (a large iron tripod) is installed to serve as the cooking stand. The fireplace not only keeps the room warm, but meals are also cooked on it by placing the pot on the *loadnang*. The floor of the *ghunsa panthang* is made of thick wooden planks, laid on the sturdy beams and joists, spanned across the rooms on the posts and walls. On the back wall of *ghunsa panthang*, a small opening (*teenanang*) is made for the smoke to escape and to admit light and air into the room. At one corner of *ton-khang*, a small enclosure serves as *chhakcha* (dry toilet).

The *thoring panthang* or the second storey is normally the topmost storey of a house. It is the summer residence of the family, with lots of open space and many doors, mostly facing east to admit sun and light. The arrangement of rooms and the distribution of space on this *panthang* differ considerably from the floors below it. On one side near the entrance, there is a small cabin, called *titama pathang*, where vessels containing water are kept. Then, there is a large room, called *forting*. On the back of *forting* is a small store for grains, called *bizurath*. The other small room on this floor is the dark and stuffy *quim*, that is, the sundry store, where utensils are kept during summer. On the wooden floor of *forting*, usually mud (local: *phathing*) flooring is also provided, but it is not as compact as found elsewhere in the lower areas.

The carved woodwork in these houses deserves special mention.

The doorframes, shutters and the front panelled parts of the wooden superstructure are meticulously carved with geometrical, floral, faunal and figurative motifs by the traditional *Orases* (woodworkers). No paint or varnish is used to protect the woodwork, but occasional coats of *chuli* oil have been noted on the doorframes. Thus, the woodwork remains exposed to elements, but surely the nature has taken good care of these artistic creations.

The foundation is normally dug 60 to 90 centimetres deep, depending upon the availability of firm strata. It is then filled with stones. As the ground profile is on a slope, the plinth is seldom taken above the ground level, and the walls for the superstructure are straightaway raised from the ground level. The thickness of wall generally remains about 90 to 120 centimetres and these are made of timber-bonded dry stone masonry. This type of wall is known as *doriya*. Elsewhere in the lower region, it is known as *katth-kuni*. The *cheols* (wooden framework) for the walls are made of either deodar or *chilgoza* (*Pinus gerardianal*) wood. The *doriya* walls are only taken up to the height of ground floor. Above that, the walls are all made of thick wooden planks, as thick as five to eight centimetres, fixed in sturdy wooden frames.



A traditional *pinchhung* (fuel and grain store) at Chhitkul.

For laying the floors, the beams are spanned across the rooms, resting on the outer walls on the ground floor and on the sturdy vertical members of the panelled wooden walls on the upper floors. Since the rooms are of abnormally large size, wooden posts are erected in the room to prop up the beams. On the beams and wall plates, joists are fixed. On such framework, thick planks are fixed to complete the flooring work. The planks are kept exposed. The entire woodwork of flooring and roofing is very crude, with beams, joists and planks hewn in a very casual and rough manner. Nevertheless, the top surface of floor planks is made smooth by repeated scrubbing and rubbing. Similar operation is carried out for laying the *khayap*, that is, the roof. However, over the thick roofing planks, a lining of *shakpang*, that is, *bhojpatr* (*Betula utilis*) is spread. Over that, tender shoots of *burche* (a local variety of bush) are spread and beaten to compaction, followed by a layer of fifteen to twenty centimetres thick earth. During winter, the snow piled on the rooftop has to be immediately removed with the *woll* (wooden shovel-like implements) lest the roof starts leaking and may even collapse under its own weight.

At some distance from the house, a small wooden storehouse is made for the storage of foodstuff. It is known as *pinchhung*. This cabin is internally partitioned into different compartments for storing different items separately. The roofing arrangement for *pinchhung* is similar to that of the main residential house.

### HOUSE TYPES IN LOWER KINNAUR

The lower Kinnaur may be defined as an ethno-climatic buffer zone. Here, the Brahmanical socio-religious traditions of the mainland and that of the Himalayan Buddhism have blended with the autochthonous faith-systems to form a quintessential socio-cultural milieu, in which the Khash element predominates. The impact of those influences is unmistakably noted in the structural woodcarvings of the residential houses and temples. This terrain abounds in deodar forests and the people have made maximum use of it in their houses and temples. It is common to find most of the residential houses and temples in many villages of this area roofed with wooden planks in the style of overlapped slate roofing. For instance, most of the houses in village Chhitkul, deep in Baspa

valley, are not only exclusively made of wood, but are also covered with wooden 'slates'. Similarly, the *Maishur* temple at Sungra is technically a one-piece portable massive wooden structure standing on the sturdy plinth beams.

At many places in the higher reaches of lower Kinnaur, besides deodar wood, another species of pine, *Pinus gerardiana*, locally known as *neoza* or *chilgoza*, is also used as structural timber. However, the *chilgoza* wood is highly resinous and inflammable. Therefore, it is neither good nor safe for the structural purposes. The splinters of that wood, locally called *iyokhti*, are used for lighting purposes during the night. The *Pinus gerardiana* tree is exclusive to a small stretch between Nichar and Kalpa, where, in the cold and semi-arid climatic conditions, it grows wild on the rocky slopes. This tree is not found elsewhere in the Indian Himalayan region.

The wood-based domestic architecture of this region is overwhelmingly conditioned by the geophysical peculiarity of this rocky and rugged terrain, composed of mica-laden schist gneiss and conglomerate formations. The Satluj flows from northeast to southwest as a foaming, fretting and spattering river, forming a deep, dark and precipitous gorge. Thus, the mountain slopes on both sides of this river are very steep and unstable. Sliding of massive chunks of mountain and rocks, destroying villages and houses, is a common sight in this part. Therefore, the habitable areas are located widely apart higher on the mountain slopes, where sun is plentifully available on the safer and flatter spurs, ledges and meadows.

Under such constraints, the houses in this terrain are generally not spread horizontally, but rise vertically in multi-storey. We find this feature in the Khash architecture of the neighbouring Shimla district also, but it is more marked here than anywhere in Shimla district or in the rest of Himalayan interiors. Another peculiarity of the Kinnauri domestic architecture is that in it certain features of Khash domestic architecture and trans-Himalayan architecture may be found blended together. For instance, the over-hanging veranda on the upper floors is a typical Khash feature, but providing flat roof on the building is a trans-Himalayan architectural feature.

Normally, there is no separate kitchen; cooking is done in one of the living rooms on the upper floor. In the middle of room, a large and sturdy slate stone is placed. Over it, a thick layer of well-rammed earth, with raised edge-lines, is built. Over the cooking platform, a sturdy iron tripod, locally called *meling*, is placed. The fuel wood is placed under the *meling*, which holds the cooking pot over it. Sometimes, an aperture may be provided on the flat roof above for the smoke to escape, but in most cases, the smoke keeps whirling in the room and gradually escapes through the door. The cooking platform not only serves as a hearth, but family members can also huddle around it and keep warm. In Lahul, Christian missionaries introduced a fuel-saving portable multi-purpose *chullah*, made of thick iron sheet. It has an inbuilt smoke outlet system and many cooking stands to cook several dishes at the same time. This *chullah* has also become popular among the people of lower Kinnaur, where fuel wood has been amply available. Of late, with the introduction of cooking gas and the chronic paucity of fuel wood, the *Lahuli chullah* is increasingly losing its popularity.

In the residential houses and temples of lower Kinnaur, timber is used profusely and stone is restricted generally to the foundation and the timber-bonded stone masonry walls of the ground floor only. The upper floors may be all wooden. Even for covering roofs, substantial quantity of wood is used over the gabled and flat roofs. In case of the flat roof, the roofing planks are covered with the rammed earth.

Most of the houses here are three-storeyed, but there are also houses having four or five storeys. The floor height is normally kept around 2.25 metres. Customarily, each of the upper floors, except the top-most one, has two rooms. While the ground floor is used exclusively for keeping livestock, the first storey is meant for living purposes. A room on the second storey is used for threshing grains. This floor also has an open terrace in front, where clothes and grains may be spread for drying.

The size of a house and the area to be covered depends more on the availability of a suitable site rather than on the requirement and affordability of the owner. Due to the scarcity of suitable land, people seldom think of building a new house for their extended



family, but add another floor to the existing house. The need of a new house arises only when the existing house becomes too old and fragile to stand anymore or it is burnt down. In fact, fire has been the single most destructive agent for wooden houses made of inflammable deodar wood in lower Kinnaur.

When someone intends to construct a house, the approval of village deity is solicited. For that purpose, a clod of earth from the proposed site is taken to the temple; the oracle in the deity proclaims decision about the site, date and time for laying the foundation. To begin with, the foundation stone is laid on the right side of the main door. Normally, Sunday, Monday, Wednesday and Thursday of the bright half of the Indian months *Baishakh* to *Ashadh*, that is, from mid-April to mid-July are considered auspicious for starting construction.

The foundation is dug about 60 to 90 centimetres deep and about half a metre wide. It is filled with dry stone rubble masonry. In certain cases, hammer dressed stones are also used for this purpose, depending upon the resources of owner. The walls are raised in this manner up to the plinth level. Above the plinth, the timber-bonded stone masonry walls, locally known as *doriya*, are built. The wooden framework for *doriya* is quite substantial in this area, as timber is easily available. The gaps for doors, niches and small openings for light and air are left in the walls during construction. No regular window or ventilator is provided. The small-screened openings serve that purpose. Similarly, the lintels or arches are obviated by the *cheols* (wooden framework).

Depending upon the availability of wood and the capacity of the owner, the timber-bonded stone masonry wall may be restricted to the ground floor only or taken up to the roof level of the house. If one can afford, he would prefer wooden walls for the upper floors. Because, the wooden walls not only keep the interior insulated from the outside temperature, but these are also lighter on the substructure. Further, the wooden walls, made of the intricate staggered framework and joinery, not only create sufficient space for the cupboards, shelves and doors, but these can also withstand all types of stresses and strains. The only disadvantage is that wood is highly susceptible to fire.

In the process of raising walls, the floor beams and joists are

placed in position at the appropriate levels, and the joists are extended beyond the wall to support the cantilevered veranda. On the flooring joists, thick deodar wood planks, sometimes as thick as five to seven centimetres, are laid to complete the flooring work. No other flooring material is spread on those planks. Noteworthy in the whole process is that the local *Orases* are so accomplished in handling wood with perfect joinery and without nails and screws that even after years of weathering, the joints remain flawless, firm and strong.

In each of the upper floors, a cantilevered veranda is provided in front and on the sides. That veranda is generally closed completely or partially with the wooden panels, fitted in the framework. Small and stylised arcuate openings are left in those panels to admit light and air into the interior. The panels are artistically carved from outside to beautify the façade. These carved panels are some of the finest specimens of architectural woodcarving in the secular architecture of this region.

When the walls reach roof height, beams and joists are laid on the walls to make understructure for roofing. These are extended on all sides beyond the wall to cover the overhanging verandas. Thick wooden planks are laid on these beams and joists to form a flat roof. Over the roofing planks, birch-bark lining is spread, over which, moist sieved clay is rammed to compaction. That process is repeated occasionally. During winters, removing snow piled on the roof with wooden shovels (local: *woll*) is a routine feature.

While most of the roofing area of a house is covered with flat roof, the superstructure walls of one of the rooms are raised further to form a room on the flat roof. That is meant for threshing grains. Over that room, a gabled roof is provided. The method of making gabled roof is very primitive and wasteful. Since slate is generally not available in most of the places in lower Kinnaur, wooden planks are used for covering the roof in the manner of laying slates. Those planks have to be replaced after a few years. However, in Baspa and Bhaba valleys, coarse and thick slates are found, which the people use as roof covering material. Once the structural work of a house is complete, the interior surface of the walls (if these are not wooden ones) are plastered with a mixture of cow-dung and mud. White washing is unknown in this area, as no white

earth is available around. However, of late, people are using ruddle (*geru*) and varnish paints on the woodwork.

Every household has a separate storage cabin, reasonably away from the house, called *kothar*, for storing the grains. People avoid storing grains in the house lest an accidental fire should destroy it. The *kothar* is a sturdy square or rectangular wooden structure of about 2.00 to 2.50 metres square and about 3.00 metres tall, with a wooden gabled roof over it. It is divided into four apartments, each with a small door and locking arrangement. This door is opened only when something has to be taken out. There is also a small inlet at the top for the grains to be stored in. In one of such storage apartments, brackets are also made on the walls to store *shakpo* (dry meat) and fruits.

After the house is complete, a house-warming function, locally known as *gaurasing*, is held. On that occasion, the chief *Oras* is formally invited along with his family. A grand feast is held in his honour in the evening. Next morning, the owner offers him a *thali* (plate) full of ghee and some money. In addition, clothes are given to him and his wife. She also receives some silver ornaments. It is mandatory that the owner should satisfy him with ample gifts lest the curse of his displeasure, locally known as *chul*, should stick to the family. Although, the customary institution of *gaurasing* has now vanished, yet the hereditary *Orases* and *Baddhis* still work on daily wages or on contract for their traditional clients and others.

# 11

## ARCHAEOLOGY & MONUMENTS

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### BUDDHIST MONASTERIES

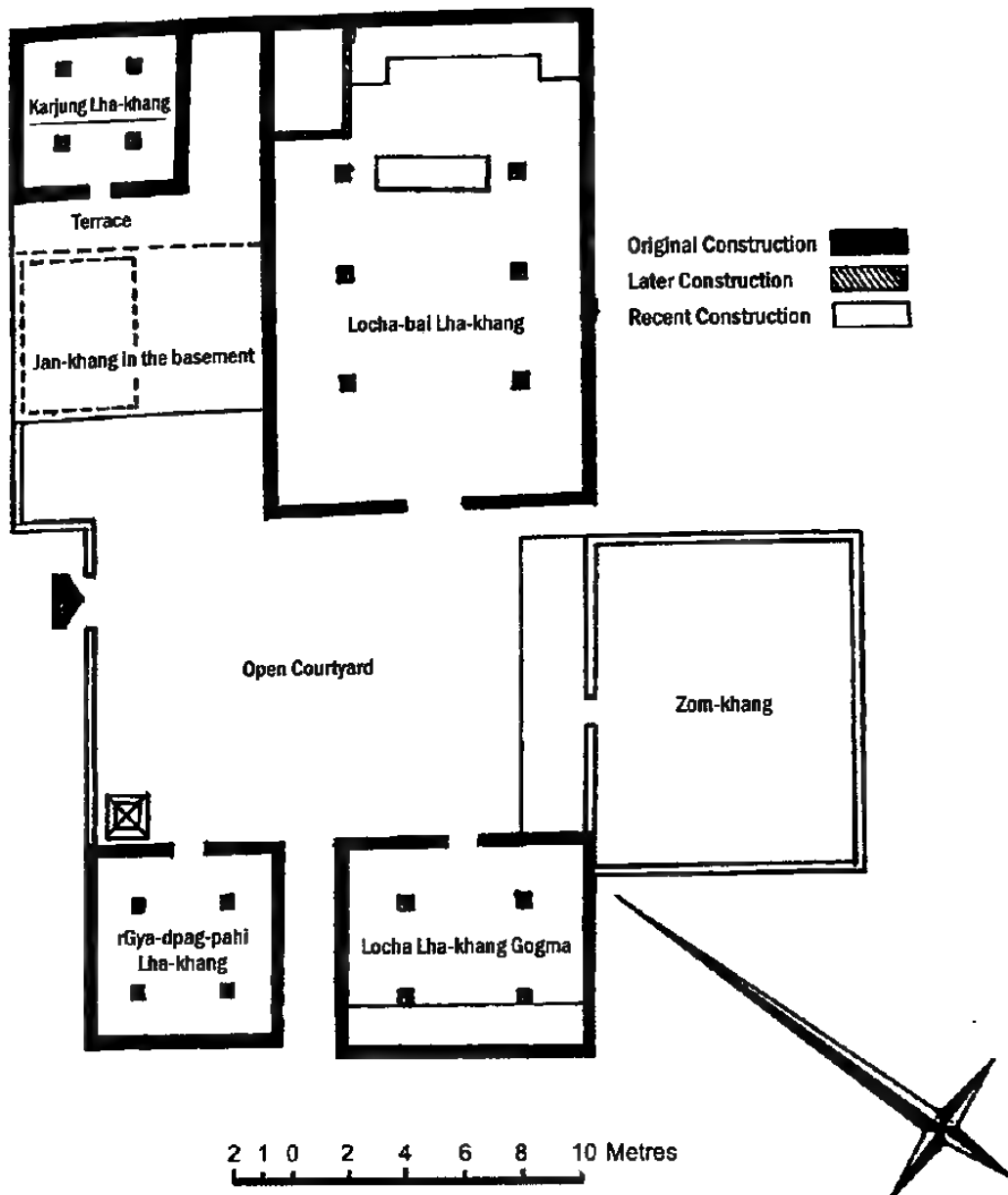
As the tradition has it, the association of Buddhism with Kinnaur may be as old as the times of Guru Padmsambhav (CE c. 717-762). According to the *Terma* tradition and local folklore, Guru Padmsambhav is known to have landed at Nako on his way to *Dbus-Gtsang* (Central Tibet). There are presently about forty Buddhist temples and monasteries belonging to the Nyingmapa, Dugpa and Gelukpa sects of Himalayan Buddhism in Kinnaur. With new monasteries and temples coming up at many places, the number of these keeps on swelling. Many of these Buddhist establishments have imbibed secular influences from the mainland, under which these have been undergoing repeated changes and modifications in religious dispensation and functions. Much material of Buddhist archaeological importance has been lost to the 'pious vandalism' and only remoter temples are left to unfold the past. The *Locha Lha-khang* at Nako is the only *chos-khor* that still preserves the glory of its hoary past to some extent despite the damage inflicted to it by a team of 'foreign experts'. Unfortunately, much of its ancient grandeur has been lost to that pious vandalism. The temples at Poo and Ropa also possess some traces of its past legacy. However, all these relics are now in a pathetic state of preservation, first due to the human neglect and apathy, and secondly due to the pious vandalism perpetuated by the neo-

intellectuals, who miserably betray ignorance of the traditional ethos and culture. Thus, although very little has remained original and of historical interest in most of them, yet one cannot help but feel overwhelmed by the nostalgic ambiance of these monasteries.

Nevertheless, many of these monasteries have very hoary past and long history. Many of these are as old as 10<sup>th</sup> century, traditionally associated with the Great *Lotsab* Rinchen Sangpo (CE 958-1055). However, not all of those establishments are directly associated with him: many were built by his contemporaries, but ascribed to him in the folk traditions. Besides, being the centres of great religious merit, these ancient monasteries have been the repositories of sacred Buddhist literature and art. Let us revisit some of these ancient monasteries.

### *Chos-khor at Nako*

After a tiresome and winding ascent of about three kilometres from Yangthang – a roadside shanty village – one reaches Nako, the highest village of Kinnaur at 3,625 metres above the MSL. Spread along the rim of a large azure blue lake, this village is a veritable oasis in the trans-Himalayan cold desert. One can also drive to Nako on a seven kilometres long link road that bifurcates from the Hindustan-Tibet road (National Highway No. 22) at Kyangsar Khad, located at about 188 kilometres from Rampur and 320 kilometres from Shimla. Passing through the muddy lanes in the village, one comes across as many as eight-nine chapels dedicated to the indigenous and Buddhist deities. Many of those chapels and *chortens* may be seen sandwiched between the residential houses. The ruined structures around and within the village indicate that many more temples and *chortens* might have existed in this village much before the village came up here, at least in its present form. From the material of ruins and popular traditions, it may be assumed that the Buddhist association of Nako may go to the times of Guru Padmsambhav (CE c. 717-762). Besides the assortment of ancient structures scattered in the village, there stood a much damaged large monastic-complex on the northwestern edge of the village. That complex was recently 'restored' by some foreign agency very badly and extended, distorting its original layout.



Plan of monastery at Nako.

How that wanton mutilation went unnoticed by the local authorities, betrays the callous attitude of those who are responsible for the protection of the material and tangible heritage of this area.

Besides the large monastic-complex that belongs to the Dugpa, there are number of standing ancient temples, *dangyur*-chapels and *chortens* in and around the village. The number of such monuments might have been quite large, as may be known from the number of ruined structures between the residential houses and

the ones scattered around the village. There also exists a small nunnery among the residential houses near the lake. Thus, Nako has a unique distinction of being a village in the entire Himalayan region, which has so many votive structures, chapels and a large *chos-khor*, all concentrated at one place. However, of main interest in the village is the large *chos-khor*, popularly known as *Locha lha-khang*, i.e., the *Lotsab lha-khang* after the Great *Lotsab Rinchen Sangpo*, who founded it.

Standing in a melancholic state on the edge of village towards the northwest on a large and flat terrace within a *cags-ri* (boundary wall), this monastery-complex might have been conceived as a centre of religio-spiritual and scholastic pursuits, like the one at Tabo. This monastery-complex originally had four large and independent temples on the four quadrants, spaced widely apart leaving ample open area for the central square courtyard. These are: (1) *Locha-bai lha-khang* or *Lotsab lha-khang*, (2) *Zom-khang*, (3) *Locha lha-khang Gogma*, i.e., Upper *Lotsab* temple, and (4) *rGgya-dpag-pahi lha-khang*. Apart from these original temples, a new apartment, called *Karjung lha-khang*, was added to the complex in the recent past. Thus, now it has five independent structural apartments.

*Locha-bai lha-khang* or *Lotsab lha-khang* is the largest and most interesting temple of this *choskhor*. It measures  $17.40 \times 11.00$  square metres internally. The interior of this temple is interspersed by six wooden pillars in two rows of three pillars each, demarcating the aisles on the sides and a wider space in the middle. On the extreme left corner of this temple, there is a small cell, known as *Gon-khang*. In that cell, *Chos-skyong* (Guardian of Faith) resides. This cell might have been created by encroaching upon the area of *Locha-bai lha-khang* in the 17<sup>th</sup> century under the Gelukpa influence. Entry to *Gon-khang* is a strict taboo. The *Locha-bai lha-khang* is a profusely painted temple of the *choskhor* with numerous metallic and stucco images arranged on the altars at different levels.

The flat mud roof of this large rectangular temple is laid on the planks. The wooden underside of the roof serves as ceiling for the temple. It is profusely painted in different panels with extraordinary skill. On these panels, the stylised mythical quasi-anthropomorphic, avian, faunal and aquatic subjects may be seen painted

in different Indian primary colours, with predominating effect of bright ochre. Many of these painted panels are gradually suffering damage due to seepage from the roof.

This temple enshrines behind the altar an imposing large and white stucco of the Sarv-vid Vairochan (*Kun-rig rNam-par-sNam-mDzad*) against the back wall. He is seated cross-legged in *padmasan* posture. Probably, his hands originally described the well-known *dharmchakrapravartan mudra*, but his left arm was fractured, and the later clumsy restoration distorted the original position. On the wall behind him at the higher level is a miniature stucco of an acolyte, emerging out of the curling clouds, with his hands joined in adoration. An elaborate arrangement of the decorative stuccoed devices, such as the *nags* (serpents), *makars* (crocodiles), *garud*, etc. has been done around the acolyte. The four Dhyani Buddhs, two on each side, flank the Sarv-vid Vairochan. All these Dhyani Buddhs, painted in their characteristic colours, are seated cross-legged on the lotus cushions in their typical *mudras*. On the left of Dhyani Buddh-pentad, there is a magnificent and graceful golden-yellow stucco of the fivefold Prajnaparamita in the middle of side wall. She is seated on a double cushioned lotus-seat with her hands in *vyakhyan mudra*. However, her characteristic attributes – the lotus flowers unfolding at her shoulders carrying the Book of Transcendent Wisdom – are missing. Those might have originally been in position. The goddess is set in an elaborate stuccoed *vedika* (altar), composed of adoring human figures, *nags*, *makars*, etc. Capping the altar is an indeterminate avian device. Besides the large stuccoes of Dhyani Buddh-pentad and Prajnaparamita, there are small stucco-images of *bDe-gShegs So-lNga* or *lTung-bShags* (i.e., Thirty-five Buddhs of Forgiveness of Sins), projected from the walls in two horizontal rows. These small images belong to the circle of the so-called *Sangs-rgyas sTong* (i.e., the Thousand Buddhs), who often adorn the walls of Buddhist monasteries in the Himalayan interiors. There are a few other stuccoed images of Shakyamuni, Tara and Padmsambhav, a couple of miniature *chortens* and a few masks on the altar; some of these masks are also stuck on the adjoining pillars, but these are neither old nor of artistic merit.

This temple has also been traditionally known as *gSer-khang*, i.e., the Golden Temple, which would indicate the use of gold for



the murals in this temple. According to a popular tradition, the surface of walls in this temple was primed with the layer of gold dust as thick as yak's skin for the murals. The tradition may or may not be wholly true, but the glittering golden traces may still be seen on some parts of the walls. Similar tradition is associated with *gSer-khang* of Tabo *choskhor*. Most of the murals in *gSer-khang* stylistically and thematically follow the same scheme as we find in the *Lotsab*-age temples at Tabo (Spiti) and also at Alchi (Ladakh). As at Tabo and Alchi, here also artists have delved deeper in executing minute details in a very delicate manner even in miniature figures. That induces one to speculate that the artists of the same atelier were at work at all those and many other contemporary temples of Western Tibet (*Ngari-Korsum*). The same Indian influence pervades all those places in the choice of colours, figural treatment, costumes, single-cushioned lotus seats, etc.

Although, most of these murals here have been robbed of their pristine grandeur and many of them are now almost completely obliterated, thanks to the restoration carried out by the foreign 'experts', yet these still hold distinct nostalgic charm that evokes curious interest and reverence for these divine representations. The main fields of the side walls are occupied by *Sarv-vid Vairochan mandals*. On the wall to the left of the central deity, a large *Vairochan mandal* is painted. On the opposite wall is another large and complex *mandal* that represents *Vajrdhatu Mahamandal* of *Vairochan*.

*Zom-khang* is located next to *Locha-bai lha-khang* in the northern quadrant. It measures  $9.00 \times 11.20$  square metres internally. This chamber is used for assembly and discourses. There is no mural or image in this hall.

*Locha lha-khang Gogma*, i.e., the Upper *Lotsab* temple, measures  $7.00 \times 8.40$  square metres internally and faces west. It is located on a slightly higher level towards the north. This temple might have been almost completely overhauled in the unknown past that obliterated its original murals and images. The central image in this temple is of the Gauri Tara (Yellow Tara), set in an altar. Flanking her, against the same wall are the stuccoes of Eight Medicine Buddhas, four of them on each side in two horizontal rows. These eight images are projected from the walls, as at Tabo.

There are two more Buddhist images supported on the wooden posts.

Beautifully painted miniature images of the Buddhs, set in rainbow coloured aura of the energy field, may be seen on the wall behind the stuccoes. The space around is filled with elaborate floral designs. On the lower part of back wall, elaborate palatial themes are painted in eight panels, four on each sides of a central larger panel. In each of these mansions, a Bodhisattv, attired in regal robes, is represented. Each of them is painted in different colours. It appears that the murals on the side and entrance walls are of pretty later date, as may be noted from the imperfect modelling of figures. On the side walls, may be seen the almost completely damaged *mandal* diagrams. In one of these diagrams on the right side wall, Vairochan in the *dharmchakrapravartan mudra* is the central deity. On the upper right side above the entrance door may be seen an incomplete, grotesque and naked (except for the loincloth) figure of the three-eyed Alpchand Vajrpani holding his attributes and surrounded by, what possibly should be, the circle of flames. Even his hairs are depicted flaming and standing on ends. The representation of this deity, though unfinished, arouses feeling of horror.

*rGgya-dpag-pahi lha-khang* measures  $6.60 \times 6.30$  square metres internally, and it occupies the eastern quadrant, next to the damaged *chorten*. It has no image, but the masks are stored in it. On the front wall, it has a large mural of the Buddh Shakyamuni seated in meditation. He is flanked by Sariputr and Maha Maugdalayan. On the side walls, are the depictions of Amitayus, Vajrdhar and the Medicine Buddhs. Above the main door are depicted various tutelary deities. Among these, King Kesar riding a wild ass is the notable one.

*Karjung lha-khang* or *dKar-abyun lha-khang*, as the name signifies, is the white and small temple, meant for the *jomos* (nuns). This temple, measuring  $5.80 \times 5.70$  square metres internally, did not form a part of the original scheme, as at Tabo. There is a raised platform against the front wall in this temple. It is the seat of Purgyal Devta, the guardian-deity of Nako, who resides on the Mount Leo Purgyal (6,816 metres), the highest peak in Himachal Pradesh. The conventional flat mud roof over this temple is suppor-

ted on the wooden beams spanned across the walls and propped up by four intermediate wooden posts. This arrangement may also be noted in all the other temples in this complex. There is no image in this temple, but the walls are painted with various Buddhist themes. Amitabh is represented on the left wall, Shakyamuni is on the central wall and on the right is the eleven-headed Avalokiteshvar. Just above the door are depicted numerous tutelary deities. However, the extensive renovation lately carried out in this temple has almost completely damaged the murals on the front wall, and the interior gives an empty look.

The temples of Nako suffered pillage in the hands of Ladakhi mercenaries. They invaded Nako and destroyed the ancient settlement that existed on the other side of lake on the higher terraces, and the Jo's *dZong* (the castle) above it. A severe earthquake of 19<sup>th</sup> January 1975 (remembered as the Sumdo Earthquake) further inflicted extensive damage to the already weathered structures. Sometime back, the Nako Lakhang Prabandhak Committee undertook some emergency measures to protect the damaged parts, but those at best were only cosmetic treatment, which hardly could protect the structures against further deterioration, and wide cracks were visible in the weathered mud roofs and walls of the ancient temples. Those cracks admitted water onto the painted areas, seriously damaging the murals. The human apathy and vandalism further added to the process of destruction of the precious relics in the temples. The recent repairs and additions done in this complex in utter disregard to the existing condition of the frail and old structures and without considering the chemistry, style and artistry of the painted areas has only accelerated the process of degeneration in the ancient structures of this complex. There is a dire need to take congenial and effective remedial measures to this important monastery-complex before it is too late.

### ***Lotsab-Bai-Lha-Khang at Poo***

Village Poo is a sizable and prosperous village, located a little higher on a flatter slope of the mountain range, away from the Hindustan-Tibet road (HT road), but a lateral road that offtakes from it provides a vehicular approach to the administrative area,

which is located a little away towards the west of the village proper. The village itself is tending to spill over to the edge of HT road downhill near the river Satluj, and many new houses and shops may now be seen coming up on the roadside.

Although, I was aware of the historical importance of this village and its Buddhist temple from the local popular traditions and the mention of this place among the Rinchen Sangpo foundations, yet the statutory restrictions on exploration and photography in the 'Inner Line' area during my first visit discouraged me to study this temple. I had become very conscious of not offending the vigilant local officers in Kinnaur because of my earlier experience with them beyond Rakchham in Sangla, at Kalpa and at Moorang Castle. At Kalpa, even all my used film rolls were exposed to the sun. At Poo, the restrictions were severer and scary. Moreover, the small size of this sombre-looking temple did not impress me, when I cursorily looked at it from a distance in the first instance, and advanced Spitiwards. Therefore, the *Lotsab-bai-lha-khang* at village *Pu* (also spelled *sPu* in ancient inscriptions) in *Rong-chung* could not be included in my earlier works. I visited this little, but magnificent temple several times later; and each time, it aroused curiosity and questions in my mind. The foremost among those was: is the present standing temple a real Rinchen Sangpo foundation? Because, its layout unmistakably contradicted what the local tradition holds, notwithstanding the fact that the local tradition, literary and epigraphic evidences did associate this place with the Lhachen Yeshe-O (CE c. 967-1040) of Guge and the Great *Lotsab*.

Francke discovered an inscribed stone, about two metres tall, in lama's field at village *dKor* or *dKho*, i.e., Khor (probably named after Khor-re, the pre-ordination name of Yeshe-O) below Poo during his visit.<sup>1</sup> Khor now forms part of the revenue village Poo. It is located a little below the cluster of residential buildings and offices in the administrative area of the village. That relic, still in a good state of conservation under the arid and arctic climate of the area, is venerated by the people. The upper part of that relic has the representation of a *stoop* and an image of seated crowned Bodhisattv below it. On the reverse of that stone, there is an inscription of eleven lines, of which only first two lines are intelligible. Francke got that inscription read by a local lama, who read

that as *dPal-lha-btsan-po-Lha-bla-ma-Ye-shes*. Francke records:<sup>2</sup>

“It suddenly flashed on me, that it was ‘od, and that Lha-bla-ma-Ye-shes-‘od was the name of the royal priest, the early king of Guge, who had tried in vain to draw the famous Buddhist monk Atisha to his kingdom. Did the inscription really contain his name – a name which has not yet been traced anywhere? We all went close to the stone, and looked at it from all sides, even from below. And lo, it was so. The stone contained the full name of the famous personage of Tibetan history (CE c. 1025) and the words following the name were *sku-ring-la*, meaning ‘in his life time.’ I was so overjoyed at the discovery of this important record that I could not help jumping about in the field, and then embraced the lama who was just on the point of becoming displeased with my treatment of his crop.”

That inscription, fragmentary as it is, is an extremely important evidence to reveal that during the times of Lhachen Yeshe-O (CE c. 967-1040), villages of Poo and Khor (*dKhor*) already existed, and there existed a palace (*pho-brang*) of the local chief at village Poo. The inscription also obliquely suggests existence of the pre-Buddhist Bon religion at Poo. The words like *lha-chos* (i.e. the religion of gods) and *sngar-chos* (i.e., former religion) in the inscription are significant in that context. The inscription also indicates that ten princes were sent (from Guge) to propagate Buddhism, and they found a temple at Poo. Where that temple was built at Poo, may be anybody’s guess, but the circumstantial evidences and local traditions do affirm that a temple was built at the site, where the inscribed stone stood at village Khor.

There is no evidence of that legendary temple now. What could have led to the destruction of that temple may not be known. Francke suggests that the original temple, being located at the site lower than most of the houses at Poo, amounted disrespect to the god. Therefore, a new temple was built higher up in the village, where it now stands. The furnishings of the old temple were refitted into the new one. However, Francke’s suggestion is hardly reasonable. As a matter of age-old custom, the site once consecrated is voluntarily and deliberately never abandoned under any

circumstances. In fact, the original Dugpa monastery at Khor was plundered by the Mongol troops of Central Tibet in about CE 1655 during the religio-sectarian war between Lhachen Delak Namgyal (CE c. 1645-1680) and the Fifth Grand Lama Ngawang Lopsang Gyatsho (CE 1617-1682).<sup>3</sup> The discovery of Muslim graves (*Kha-che Rom-khan*) at Poo and elsewhere in Kinnaur clearly establishes that fact.<sup>4</sup> After the invaders had left and peace restored in the area, the people thought of erecting a temple in the village out of the material salvaged from the destroyed one. In that new temple, they also enshrined the sacred object of the earlier temple. Thus, while some of the votive objects, among which the famous *Prajnaparamita* manuscript ranks the foremost, are very ancient in the standing temple, the structure and the planning concept is certainly not very ancient. If at all something original of the *Lotsab*'s times ever existed in this temple, that has been obliterated by the much later decorations all over in the temple. Now, with this background, let us study the standing temple.

The much later date of construction of this temple notwithstanding, the standing Buddhist temple is the oldest one at Poo, for it not only carries the legacy of the original Rinchen Sangpo foundation, but also his identity. This temple is known as *Lotsab-bai-lha-khang*, i.e., Temple of the *Lotsab*. Passing by the side of this temple, one may find several carved monoliths piled over the *manidung*. Two of these, carrying the representations of Buddhist deities, may be seen standing in the narrow compound of the temple among the piles of carved sacred stones and the fluttering votive flags. Another monolith is fitted into the back wall of the temple. The people claim these monoliths to be as old as the inscribed stone at village Khor, but there seems to be no reason to reject or accept the folk tradition. Of late, a pompous Buddhist temple has come up in the village through the community enterprise. The Tibetan artists of Dharmsala executed enchanting Buddhist themes on the walls of this new temple in the bazaar style, which developed out of the fusion of Tibetan Buddhist themes and mannerism and the Indian academic style.

The *Lotsab-bai-lha-khang* is an unpretentious two-room structure with a fronting veranda, all covered with galvanised iron sheets; earlier it had wooden roofing. Towards the right, a room has also

been added to it, which serves as a residence-cum-store of the lama-priest. The fronting veranda, which measures  $5.90 \times 2.80$  metres square externally, serves as portico to the *du-khang*. The *du-khang* is a rectangular room of  $6.20 \times 5.90$  metres square externally. From this room, one gets into the inner chapel through a door provided at the middle of wall. The inner room (chapel) measures  $6.10 \times 6.50$  metres square externally. There is another small door on the right from the *du-khang*, which possibly serves as an entrance for performing circumambulation of the altar placed in the inner chapel.

In the chapel, the altar is stocked with Buddhist deities in a random manner. Located centrally is the gold-painted image of the seated Buddh Shakyamuni. He is holding an alms-bowl in his hands. His favourite acolytes Maugdalayan and Sariputr are standing on the sides. Further on the sides, there are two stucco-images of the standing Bodhisattvas. To the left of the principal image is the blue-painted Akshobhya and to his right is the yellow-painted Ratnasambhav. Both the Bodhisattvas are in their regal attires. Besides these, there are stucco-images of Padmsambhav, Vajrpani, the Buddh, etc. placed at the lower level on the altar. Around the corners of chapel, many broken and damaged objects may be seen dumped. Among these, we found out three badly mutilated ancient wooden images. Of those, the one of Vajrpani could be identified. There are also many wooden and stucco masks for the ritual dancing among these 'discarded' objects.

The interior of temple – ceiling, pillars, beams, etc. – are freshly painted. The walls are covered with canvas, on which new paintings have been made. Thus, the overall impression of embellishment in the interior is plush and fresh, but brazen and uninspiring. However, two ancient panels on the top corner of the wall opposite to the main entrance may be older. The main door of the temple may evoke interest on the first sight for its intricate and deep carving, but on a closer study of the style and devices, its 'modern' manufacture becomes clear. Most of the devices carved on its panels and frame are angular, geometrical and stiff. Although, woodcarver's skill is eloquently reflected in the treatment of repetitive use of the lotus devices set in the intertwining creepers and beads on the doorframe, the chisel marks still detectable on

these devices may indicate that it was crafted around a couple of centuries ago or a bit earlier. Nevertheless, the dexterous workmanship of this door really deserves admiration.

Even so, if the Buddhist temple at Poo has any claim on antiquity, it can only be justified from the *Prajnaparamita* manuscript that it has preserved very meticulously and carefully all these years, rather centuries. This manuscript, secured between two richly-carved wooden boards, is more than a metre long and some 30 centimetres wide. Each folio of the fawn-coloured handmade paper of this manuscript contains on an average ten lines written in a very immaculate handwriting in *dbu-can* script of the 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>5</sup> This manuscript is unique for the fact that it is so far the only profusely illustrated complete Tibetan manuscript of such a great antiquity.

### ***Lotsab Lha-khang at Ropa***

The Shyaso valley (also called Giabong valley after the name of its principal village) of Kinnaur district is formed by the snow-fed Ropa stream that flows down from the glacial fields of the Shrikhand range that separates this valley of Kinnaur from the Pin valley of Spiti. The Shyaso valley is known to the outside world for its high quality Kinnaur apples. However, our (my friend Peter van Ham was also with me) interest to visit this valley was not apples, but the Buddhist temple at village Ropa (2,950 metres from the MSL), associated with Great *Lotsab* Rinchen Sangpo.

The village Ropa is spread on a mountain slope along the right bank of Ropa stream, located at a distance of 29 kilometres from Poo on the fair-weather lateral road that offtakes from the HT road at Shyaso. In the biography of Rinchen Sangpo, compiled by Pel Yeshe, a place named *Ro-pag* appears among the 108 main sites, where the temples were founded during the times of the Great *Lotsab*. Joseph Gergan has identified *Ro-pag* with Ropa in Kinnaur,<sup>6</sup> and that identification led us to this remote village at the head of Shyaso valley. There are two Buddhist chapels and a brand new RCC-built temple of Chandika in the village, reflecting the extension of the cult of Chandika in the Buddhist heartland. The ancient Buddhist chapel is located in the old portion of the village and a



newly-built one in the other part. We could easily locate the ancient chapel – *Lotsab lha-khang* – among the cluster of rustic old houses. We looked for the lama-priest in-charge of the temple, but he was not in the village at that time. However, a layperson emerged out of the adjoining house, who posed himself as the custodian of temple. We requested him to open the chapel for us, telling him our purpose to visit it. However, he insisted that we could only have *darshan* in the temple, leaving our cameras, measuring tape, etc. outside, for he was under orders to neither reveal any information nor permit photography in the temple. After repeated requests, only I was allowed to enter the temple and take only cursory measurements, while my friend waited outside. Therefore, I had to depend solely on my visual faculty to explore the interior and deposit the data in my mental dossier as much I could, and feel contented at that.

This old chapel, known as *Locha lha-khang* (*Lotsab lha-khang*) lost its unicellular pristine character long ago, when a room and a porch were added to it. There is a striking difference in the material and construction style of the walls of old and new structures. While the new walls are of timber-bonded stone masonry, the old walls are of the rubble and mud masonry. The gap between the rear old part and the later extension is also very clear. The standing *Locha lha-khang* now consists of two rooms and a fronting shallow porch.

The wooden porch, located in the middle of front wall measures 2.30 metres long and 0.90 metre deep, with an overhanging wooden roof. From this porch, a 1.50 metres wide wooden door opens into the outer chapel that internally measures 6.30 metres from side to side and 3.35 metres in depth. In this chapel, a huge brass and copper *dangyur* of about 1.50 metres diameter is installed on the left side and a large stucco-image of Padmsambhav is installed on a raised pedestal on the right side, leaving the middle area as passage to the inner chapel. A 90 centimetre-wide ancient (probably original) door opens into the inner chapel from the outer one. This inner chapel is the original *Locha lha-khang* of the Rinchen Sangpo-age, which has until date retained its pristine grandeur and sanctity to a great extent in its magnificent wooden images and stuccoes. It internally measures 4.00 metres laterally and 2.90

metres in depth. In the middle of this chapel is a raised platform, on which the stucco-image of Vairochan, painted white, flanked by Dhyanī Buddhs of his *parivar*, is enshrined. The arrangement of these images conforms to the canonical prescription. There are also many other ancient and new Buddhist images on the altar. All these, especially the earlier ones, reflect the vernacular Kashmiri influence in modelling that had been so predominating in the entire Western Himalayan region during the early medieval times. On the farther end of inner chapel, there is a large alcove that measures 3.20 metres long and 2.70 metres wide. In this alcove, the ancient wooden and stucco images are enshrined.

What is noteworthy of this *Locha lha-khang* is its isolation in the remote corner of Kinnaur that has protected it from vandalism and pilferage. Even in our times, it has remained comparatively out of the gaze of most scholars. Consequently, many relics contemporary to the times of the Great *Lotsab* may still be found well preserved in this temple. Among these, the wooden images are the most important ones, for very few of these are found elsewhere in the Western Himalayan monasteries.

### Monastery and Temples at Kanam

Kanam, having as many as seven big and small temples, numerous *chortens* and quadrangular reliquaries scattered in and around the village, may aptly be called the 'monastery village' of Kinnaur. In fact, the Buddhist establishment in this village has the coveted distinction of being the most reputed Buddhist establishment of Kinnaur for its scholastic reputation. Alexander Gerard speaks of an incident of the twin reincarnation at Nako of the *Lotsab* Rimpoche of the Tashilhunpo monastery. He records that the young boys:

"each about ten years of age, reside in the monastery of Kanam, where they are taught the mysteries of their religion; they have twice been called to Teshoo Loomboo, but the Gelong who has charge of their education, told me they would not repair thither for six or eight years to come."<sup>7</sup>

That may indicate that as late as mid-nineteenth century, when

Alexander Gerard was in Kinnaur, the Buddhist establishments of Kanam commanded reputation for its scholarship in the entire Tibetan Buddhist world. An interesting explanation is given about naming of this village as *Kanam*: The word 'ka' represents the first letter of *Kangyur* and the term 'num' means a place. Thus, *Kanum* or *Kanam* means 'a place of the sacred books'.

Kanam should have been a prosperous village on the traditional route from the Indian mainland to the Central Asian world during the times of Rinchen Sangpo in the 10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> century. It is still a very prosperous village of Kinnaur, but is now drawn away from the main highway that passes a little downhill along the Satluj. A lateral road now connects Kanam with Hindustan-Tibet road. *Lotsab* Rinchen Sangpo might have considered this village to be one of the propitious places for establishing a centre for the Buddhist scholastic pursuits, and not merely a cult centre. That fact is revealed from the mention of *Ka-num* in *Nga-ra* among the temples founded by him in the peripheral areas.<sup>8</sup> However, what baffles us in this context is the fact that none of the standing temples at Kanam has any evidence, traditional or archaeological, of the association with the Great *Lotsab*. Francke, who was at Kanam on 30<sup>th</sup> June 1909, was shown a monastery:

"which by the natives themselves was asserted to be of ancient origin. It is said to go back to the days of *Lotsab* Rinchen Sangpo (*Rin-chen-bzang-po*). No relic of these ancient days, however, remains. The monastery consists of three separate halls situated in different parts of the village."<sup>9</sup>

During my last visit to Kanam, I could locate as many as seven Buddhist temples, evidences of ruined temples and one standing temple of the pre-Buddhist Chaga-drul Devta.<sup>10</sup> However, no definite evidence of the Rinchen Sangpo foundation could be found. Nevertheless, that in no way undermines the importance of this place as an ancient and reputed centre of Buddhist scholarship in the ancient times. Had there not been a strong anterior tradition of Buddhist learning at Kanam, the Hindu ruler of Bushahr kingdom, Mahender Singh (b. CE 1810, d. 1850), should not have felt the urgency of restoring the complete set of *Kangyur* and *Tangyur* for the *Kangyur* temple in this village. He is known

to have secured those volumes from Tholing (near Tashilhunpo monastery) in CE 1820, when Kinnaur formed a part of his kingdom.

The *Kangyur* building at Kanam still bears the signs of great antiquity. It architecturally follows the unicellular layout parameters of the Rinchen Sangpo-era, but that in no way should establish its contemporaneity with his times, for it had witnessed several upheavals since it was founded. As has been noted earlier in the context of monastery at Poo, the Mongol troops plundered the monasteries in Kinnaur in CE 1655. The discovery of Muslim graves (*Kha-che Rom-khan*) at Kanam may affirm that the invaders reached Kanam and plundered monasteries there.<sup>11</sup> Later, between CE c. 1810 and 1815, when the Gurkhas invaded Bushahr kingdom and remained there, they pillaged the monasteries of Kanam, and their pillaging spree extended as far as the Tibetan frontier, as reported by Gerard.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, it may be suggested that though the foundation of this building may be of the time of Rinchen Sangpo, the superstructure, as it now stands, may not be as old. Nevertheless, the building in its present condition is certainly much older than the holy books now treasured in it. That would suggest that this building was not built for the present sets of *Kangyur* and *Tangyur* (acquired in CE 1820), but it already possessed an ancient library of the Buddhist scholarship, for which it had wide reputation in the Buddhist world. That ancient collection suffered destruction at the hands of Gurkhas during their invasion and occupation of Bushahr state between CE c. 1810 and 1815. Therefore, the present volumes may be the replacement of the older ones.

The *Kangyur* is an ancient double-storey box-like building, standing independently in lower Kanam. The interior is dimly lighted and stuffy due to ill ventilation, but it is most congenial for preserving the ancient sacred manuscripts and other objects of faith. The books – one hundred volumes of *Kangyur* and two hundred and twenty-five volumes of *Tangyur* – are preserved here in separate chest-like fixed boxes. These volumes were block-printed on handmade paper from the wooden blocks in CE 1820 at Narthang, 10 kilometres away from Tashilhunpo monastery, that remained the headquarters of Panchen Lama in Central Tibet. The

Kangyur temple had the distinction of playing host to the Hungarian scholar Alexander Csoma de Koros, who studied here for more than three years from August 1827 to October 1830.<sup>13</sup> During that period, probably in CE 1829, Alexander Gerard happened to meet him in Kangyur temple at Kanam and could see the volumes of *Kangyur* and *Tangyur* in it. On those volumes he comments:

“The edition of the Kahgyur and Stangyur at Kanam was sent from Tashi-lhunpo (bKra-shis-lhun-po) only about 9 years ago (i.e. in 1820); the printing bears a date of ninety years, yet the ink and type look as perfect and fresh as ever, No insect attack them, though the climate here is varying in summer. The bookcases being made of cedar are indestructible.... The works, being distinct, are arranged on separate places. These resemble large chests or cisterns, standing on ends, and portioned into cells, each containing a volume, which is carefully wrapped within many folds, laced with chord, and bound tightly between boards of cypress or cedar.... Some of the volumes were opened before me, and I gazed with a sort of reverential feeling upon such gigantic compilations yet unfolded to the world, and thought of the humble individual in the hamlet who was occupied in illustrating their unexplored contents.”<sup>14</sup>

The inner surface of the walls of Kangyur temple is richly covered with funereal clay-tablets of ten centimetres square, on which the miniature images of Buddhist divinities are embossed. These stamped votive tablets are known as *tsa-tsa* or more correctly as *sa-tschha*, which means ‘*dharm sharir*’ of the accomplished sages. These tablets may contain funeral ash or other sacred relics mixed with the sanctified clay. Whenever, the old *sa-tschha* falls off from the wall or it is damaged, it is never thrown off, but is religiously preserved to be recycled to prepare a new one, for even the damaged or broken votive tablet preserves the spirit of *dharm sharir*. Whenever a temple is to be founded, it is customary to place ceremoniously the *sa-tschhas* at nodal points in the foundation to consecrate it. These *sa-tschhas* are generally the three-dimensional miniature images of the Buddhist divinities, painted generally in golden colour. I witnessed one of such ceremonies of consecration

being performed at Ki monastery, when a part of it was being rebuilt after it was damaged in the Sumdo Earthquake of 1975.

The main monastery of Kanam is situated on the highest terrace in the village. Probably Francke refers to it as *dGom-pa*, i.e., a temple.<sup>15</sup> It is called *Lundup Ganfel Gompa*, i.e., the temple of easy religious merit. Another name of this temple is *Kache lha-khang*, i.e., the Kashmiri temple. Possibly, this temple was built by an unknown devotee from Kashmir (Tib.: *Kache*). Rahul Sankrityayan is of the opinion that it was built by Shakyashribhadr of Kashmir in the early 13<sup>th</sup> century, hence it came to be called as *Kache lha-khang*.<sup>16</sup> Being a Kashmiri Buddhist scholar, Shakyashribhadr has been known as *Kache Penchen*, i.e., a Kashmiri Maha Pandit. However, his claim is supported neither by any evidence nor is the structural treatment of this temple as old as to ascribe it to the 13<sup>th</sup> century. The temple, when I first surveyed it in 1975, was not more than a century old. According to the local tradition, that temple was built by a lama named Tomo Geshe.<sup>17</sup>

Francke visited this temple in June-July 1909 and noted its details, according to that:

"It is a building of the ordinary Tibetan type, constructed of sun dried bricks with flat roof. It contains the cells of the lamas who belong to the Ge-lug-pa sect, and an insignificant temple. In the latter is found an image of Buddha, gilt bronze with blue hair of the pin-head type. This image was brought from bKra-shis-lhun-po (*vulgo* Trashi lunpo) about seventy years ago, so I was told. The wooden garlands which are behind this image of Buddha as well as behind some other images, may be older."<sup>18</sup>

That structure of the Francke's description might have been built after the Gurkhas destroyed the earlier temple at that site.

The monastery had undergone extensive changes since Francke visited it in 1909, for when I surveyed it in 1975, the main temple, *Lundup Ganfel Gompa*, commanded a dominating place on an elevated platform. Flanking the main temple, there were monks' quarters on the lower terrace on the sides of the central paved courtyard. The temple was a large hall, built on a raised plinth behind a wide fronting veranda. A flight of steps led one to the veranda from the

courtyard at the lower level. The temple was covered with low-pitched roof of the thick shingles, while the monks' residences on both sides had flat mud roof. That may indicate that the monks' quarters adjoining the temple were certainly older, and in the same state as Francke saw them in 1909, than the temple proper. The *du-khang* was brightly painted in Tibetan style. The Buddhist divinities were placed on the altar against the painted wall in front of the main entrance. On the right side was a huge stucco of Shakyamuni in the centre, with sacred books arranged on the shelves on both sides. The open space in the hall served as an assembly area for the monks.

On the outer walls beside the entrance to the *du-khang*, there was a large painting of the Wheel of Life (*Srid-pahi hKhor-lo*) towards the left and the Guardian Deities were painted towards the right. Since my first visit to this temple, it has completely been externally renovated.

I visited this temple again in 1994. The basic structure of the temple was the same that I had seen two decades ago. There was no significant change in the internal arrangement either, but the temple and the monks' quarters adjoining to it wore a definite refurbished look. The roof over temple now has been made gracefully loftier, with three-tiered pyramidal roof of fine shingles, as seen in most of the wooden temples of the autochthonous gods. The complex is now a well-defined edifice within the whitewashed walls and the fronting entrance gate.

Besides the Kangyur and *Lundup Ganfel* monastery, there is a separate building – *gTashi Choeling* – meant to accommodate *jomos* (nuns). A little away from the village is a temple (*lha-khang*) called *Lha-ba-rang*. This temple is of recent date, but enshrines an ancient stucco of Manjushri Manjughosh (*hJam-dpal dByangs*). The other Buddhist places at Kanam are the *Lha-khang Locha Lama* (i.e., the *Lotsab Lama* temple), the *Namgyal Chorten* and the temple of Dabala Devta (locally called *Dabblas*, i.e., a Religious Teacher). Dabala Devta had originally been an autochthonous animistic god, who later embraced Buddhism and abhorred sacrificial rites.

## TEMPLES

The magnificent wooden temples of Kinnaur, dedicated to the local deities – *Maishur*, *Nags* and *Narains* and several goddesses, are some of the finest examples of structural woodcarving in the entire Himalayan region. The lower Kinnaur abounds with such temples, because finest species of Himalayan deodar has been available here plentifully. Not only these woodcarvings are of great artistic merit, but also the foolproof and meticulous technique of fitting and jointing them in the temple structures is also unique. The local *Orases* and *Baddhis* have perfected that technique through generations. Perfect joinery without using bolts, nails or glue is the hallmark of these traditional artisans; and so is the technique of erecting temple on the surface, without planting it on the ground, unique to the Satluj valley in lower Kinnaur and downstream in Outer Seraj area of Kullu. Temples built by this technique may also be seen in the Satluj watershed of Shimla district, but such temples are not too many.

Almost each village in lower Kinnaur has such magnificent wooden temple dedicated to one of the local manifestations of *Maishur*, *Nags* or *Narains*. However, the wooden temple at Sungra, dedicated to *Maishur* is the finest example of such temples that eloquently glorifies skill and artistry of the traditional wood-carvers. Let us visit this temple and study it in a bit detail.

**Maishur Temple at Sungra**

Going upstream in the Satluj gorge, we enter in the fabled land of *Maishur*, *Nags* or *Narains* in lower Kinnaur, which forms a sort of 'buffer zone' between the Brahmanical mainland and the Buddhist trans-Himalayan upper Kinnaur. Although, the indigenous faith-systems have been incessantly losing their primitive intensity and undergoing metamorphism under the predominating Brahmanical influences, yet the cult of *Maishur* (and of the *Nags* or *Narains*) is still holding ground despite the fact that some scholars have erroneously project it to be a localised version of the cult of Mahashiv or *Mahasur*. In fact, there is a need to examine the impugned cult-system of *Maishur* in a wider spatio-temporal format, especially in the context of the cult of Mahasu at Hanol in





Maishur temple at Sungra.

Jaunsar-Bawar *pargana* of Uttarakhand, to probe into the genesis of this cult and remove confusion.

The pantheistic system under the generic cult of *Maishur* is very elaborate and complex. In this 'buffer zone', there are five *Maishurs*, identified by the names of villages where they have their principal temples. Thus, each of the five *Maishurs* is known after his bona fide seat, as *Maishur* of Chagaon, *Maishur* of Bhaba, *Maishur* of Poari, *Maishur* of Mahbar and *Maishur* of Sungra. Each of them has a magnificent wooden temple at his place of residence, but the temple of *Maishur* of Sungra, the eldest of all the five *Maishurs*, is the most pompous and unique example of the wood-based architecture. All the five *Maishurs* have their spouses. They are Ukha, Chitralkha, Chandika, goddess of Chhota Kamba, and goddess of Pirasan. All these spouses have their own magnificent temples.

The *Maishur* temple at Sungra is located at an altitude of 2,100 metres in the outskirts of the village on a secluded flat and open

terrace below the road, some seven kilometres from Bhabanagar on the link road to Nichar. This road takes off from National Highway No. 22 (HT road) at Bhabanagar. This magnificent all-wood *Maishur* temple is 'virtually portable' structure of typical layout, superstructure and roofing arrangements that makes it stand apart from other canopied composite-roofed wooden temples.

Although located close to the road, this temple escaped notice of most of the colonial travellers and scholars, probably because of its obscured location behind the screen of thick foliage of mighty deodars. The stumps of those trees may be seen rotting at the site even today. Later, during the post-independence period, it remained ignored on the old Hindustan-Tibet mule track, while most of the visitors drove to Kinnaur and beyond on the new motorable road (NH 22), aligned along the Satluj, miles down in the gorge. Further, most of the scholars on Kinnaur concentrated on the socio-cultural aspects of this 'newly discovered' fabled land, and cared little about the exotic wood-based architecture. Therefore, except for Francke, none has taken notice of this and several other masterpieces of indigenous architecture of this area. Francke wrote about this temple:

"It is a fine specimen of hill architecture, and reminds one of the famous temple of Hidimba at Manali in Kullu.... While the temples of Nirmand have the shape of an ordinary rectangular house with a single gable roof, the temple at Sungra has a square ground-plan and three slanting roofs, one above the other, the lower one being the largest, and the top one the smallest of the three. While the two lower ones are square, the top one is round, of the shape of a funnel. The four corner beams of the lowest roof end in wooden figures of walking lions, almost lifesize. The temple contains *lingam*. There are no inscriptions round about. In the temple yard we saw two very rude specimens of shikhar stone temples."<sup>19</sup>

Nothing substantially has changed since 26<sup>th</sup> June 1909, when Francke visited this temple, and what he has said can well be verified at the site even today, although his observation about this

temple is much off the mark when he describes its layout and compares its architecture with that of the Hidimba temple and of those at Nirmand. In fact, there hardly is any comparison between either of them in any manner.

The fragments of structural stones scattered around the standing wooden temple and the couple of piles of such fragments formed into mini-shrines would indicate that before the wooden temple, there might have stood a stone *shikharakar* temple at this site. In the absence of adequate evidences, it may be preposterous to say definitely as to which deity that temple belonged. However, the stone *lingam* still enshrined in the standing wooden temple may suggest that the earlier one could be a Shiv temple, despite the fact that no surviving tradition of Shaiv cult has so far been noted in this 'buffer zone.'

The standing temple is laid out in the form of a *yonipeetth*, though it actually is not, because in *yonipeetth*, the spout forms an outlet on the side and not at the entrance. To define it technically, we may say that it has been laid out to distinctively form a *garbh-grih* with *pradakshina-path* and the fronting *antaral*. The *garbh-grih* and the *pradakshina-path* are laid out on a square plan, with each side measuring 7.62 metres externally. Attached to it in the front is an *antaral* measuring  $3.05 \times 3.35$  square metres externally. Interestingly, the superstructure of this temple stands on the massive plinth framework of sturdy deodar beams of 45.00 centimetres section. That massive framework rests on the dry stone masonry platform. Thus, the entire wooden superstructure stands on a wooden framework, and technically it does not have foundation. However, the *garbh-grih* is defined by the 46.00 centimetres thick timber-bonded masonry wall, around which there is a 1.22 metres wide *pradakshina-path*.

The temple superstructure is completely enclosed from all sides with wooden planks, fitted in position with the wooden framework to form panels. The sides of *antaral* are also enclosed in that manner, but the carved panels here are of recent date; so are the main wooden door and its side panels profusely carved in floral pattern and figural devices of recent date. The panels on the sides of *antaral* carry numerous classical Hindu deities, but the treatment of these panels is very immature and crude. Among the anthro-

pomorphic forms, there is one discordant *maithun* theme on one of the left side panels.

The roofing arrangement of this temple is particularly striking. It deviates considerably from the roofing style of other wooden temples, wherein distinction is maintained between the roofs of *garbh-grih* and rest of the temple. In this temple, the two-tiered roofing over *garbh-grih* and rest of the area is integrated, but with an additional conical canopy over the *garbh-grih*. The bottom tier of the roof has a pent-roof, which extends over the entire built-up area. The same arrangement is repeated for the second tier, but with a composite pent-n-gabled roof on the front. The vertical clearance between the two tiers is high enough to show out internal wooden framework. The attenuated conical parasol stands on the second tier, with a distinct but small vertical clearance in between. The entire temple is roofed with wooden planks. Significantly, there is no ornamentation provided on the roof-ends. However, the wooden tigers (or lions) are fixed extra on the hip-ends and ridgepoles. The heads of ridgepoles are also artistically carved to form a composite rosettes with bells. This temple has undergone considerable renovation in the recent past. Nevertheless, the original structure of this temple is ancient, very interesting and very balanced. Interestingly, this roof type is common to all the *Maishur* temples in this area.

On the right side of main temple at some distance, there is an open wooden *mandap*. The structure is much older to the now-renovated and painted main temple. It carries very interesting woodcarvings on its pillars and other structural parts. The *mandap* is used for the *devta* to sit while on his *rath* during the celebrations.

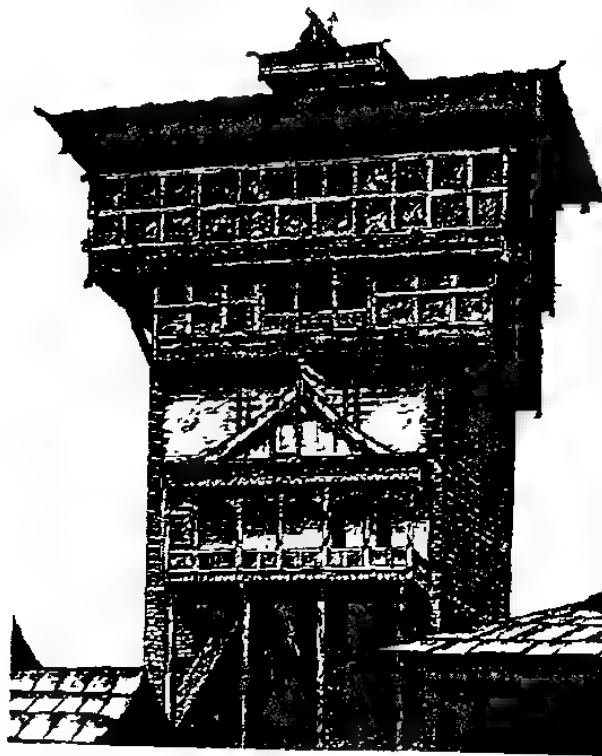
### CASTLES

The towering castles, widely spread throughout the district on the strategic heights, are the relics of hoary past, when this area was divided into various *khoonds* and *tthakurais*. These towers, now having remained in disuse and neglect for centuries are in pitiable state of conservation, but the locals still consider those relics in high esteem and awe. In fact, the clan goddesses of the bygone *khoonds* and *tthakurais* still reside in them, and any disrespect

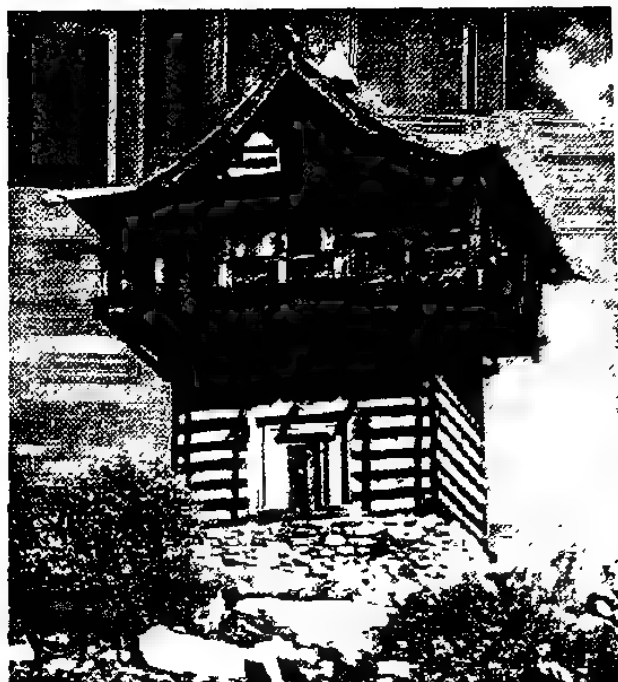
shown to them attracts instantaneous retribution. Therefore those terrific demonic goddesses have to be occasionally appeased. Almost all these castles are the mute evidences of the hoary past of Kinnaur. Many tales have been woven around these towering structures. Herein, we shall be discussing some of the important ones.

### **Kamru Castle**

Situated on the commanding rocky outcrop of a mountain spur at an altitude of about 2,500 metres from the MSL in the heart of scenic Baspa valley above Sangla village, Mone is one of the most ancient villages of Kinnaur district, having a very eventful and hoary past. According to the apocryphal traditions, and these are too numerous, a fugitive cadet from the mainland founded the kingdom at Mone after having entered Baspa valley from Badrinath in Uttarakhand in the unknown past. He also carried a replica of the image of lord Badrinath as his protective god. Thus, Badrinath became a clan deity of the ruling house of that unnamed kingdom. That became known as the Bushahr kingdom



The Kamru Castle.



Bara Kila at Chhitkul.

after the name of Bashahru Devta, when Kalyan Singh (CE c. 1607-1639) established its capital-in-transit from Sarahan to Rampur near the temple of Bashahru Devta in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

The castle-temple at Mone (Kamru), called *Mone-pra* or *Mone-gorang* in Kinnaur, belongs to the *tthakurai* period, when the residence for *tthakur* and the protective goddess was provided in the same high-rising tower. The tall Kamru tower, standing on an 11.00 metres square base was designed as a defensive structure for being adequately garrisoned against attack. For that reason, the five-storey tall tower was conceived as a multifunctional structure on a one storey high solid plinth. To reach the ground floor, it originally had a portable notched stepladder, which could be lifted up conveniently into the building when required. However, under the new role of this edifice as a temple, not only a regular wooden staircase has been provided, but the entire structure has also been transformed and refurbished to cater to the popular religious aspirations.

On the ground floor of this tall edifice, there are five rooms. These were used as kitchen, stores and refectory. On the first floor, there are three rooms. One of them is empty. The larger room

enshrines Buddhist tutelary deities. It is believed that these deities were brought here from Tholing, the capital of Guge kingdom in *Ngari-Korsum* (Western Tibet). These images might have been brought here as the marriage-gift with *Guge ri Rani*, who had her palace – Guge Rani's palace at Sapni (*Da-pang*). The third room was meant for the religious dispensation. Out of the five rooms on the second floor, one remains always closed. It is held that once a leopard ventured into that room and it has been there since then. The other room is used for slaughtering animals during the triennial fair that is held here when the goddesses of Chhitkul, Rakchham, Badsari, Sangla, Chansa, Shaugh and Sarahan visit Kamru to pay their homage to Goddess Kamakhya, the senior-most among them. The third room is used for sacrificial rituals and the fourth is used for enshrining the visiting goddesses. The fifth room is an armoury that stores old weapons and ammunition. On the third floor, the largest room was used as *darbar* hall and the other room served as the private chamber for the *rani*. Three other rooms were used for kitchen, store and water-storage. On the fourth and the top floor is the temple of the presiding goddess Kamakhya.

The Kamru castle, as it stands today, is an elaborate structure of the traditional wood-n-stone four-wall. This structure might have undergone extensive modifications and additions after it was held by the early rulers of Bushahr kingdom. The balcony-like canopy in front of the main entrance on the plinth and the enclosed graceful balconies on the two top floors are such additions. Still, much later modifications may be noted from the flat and plain panelling work of the cantilevered balconies. However, the tapered and gracefully turned and fluted posts are indicative of the artistic grandeur of earlier woodwork. The tower-structure is covered with the high-pitched pent roofing, surmounted by a gable-roofed canopy, which has imparted to this ancient structure a dignified eminence.

### **Sapni Castle**

Perched higher up on a rocky spur of the mountain range above Karcham (now a vanished village) in lower Kinnaur is a modest and sleepy village of Sapni, called *Da-pang* in local dialect. Over-

looking the whole valley below, this village also provides a breath-taking panorama of the variegated mountain ranges rising in succession on all sides as far as the eyes can see. Being located away from the main road at an altitude of 2,600 metres above the MSL, this village has remained out of reach of most of the travellers to Kinnaur. Thus, this castle-temple in the indigenous wood-based architecture has remained virtually unnoticed. However, evidences suggest that this tall castle once remained an important local centre of authority and opulence that attracted abortive attack from the Gurkhas. However, it languished into obscurity after the capital of erstwhile Bushahr state was shifted from Mone (Kamru) to the present-day Rampur town down in the Satluj valley. However, the prevailing congenial geo-climatic local condition and the extensive use of long-lasting deodar wood in the construction of this castle has kept it so far in a good state. However, the environment of inner Himalayan valleys has been undergoing dramatic changes with the introduction of numerous so-called 'eco-friendly development activities.' The level of humidity and temperature has increased alarmingly. This has alarmingly accelerated the process of decaying and ageing of the ancient monuments and other objects of the material culture. Pernicious effects of that degradation are already visible on some of the structural components of this castle;



Nag temple at Sapri (newly built).



being located closer to the monsoonal zone towards the south.

This impressive towering palace-n-temple structure stands majestically on a rocky ledge at a secluded spot in the village. The site is approachable from Karcham on a six-kilometre long bumpy jeepable road. However, there is also another approach to the village – a three-kilometre arduous yet scenic pedestrian track on the thickly wooded mountain ascent from Karcham. The fatigue of that steep ascent is well compensated at the sight of vast mountainous landscape spread out before the visitor on reaching the vista-point on the ledge. A maze of mountain ranges, clothed in deep green foliage of the coniferous forests, capped by extensive snowfields, is seen all around, forming a magnificent backdrop for the castle-temple.

This palace-n-temple is a castle-like colossal structure comprising two buildings, integrated into one. The double storey building on the right, known as the palace of Guge Rani, provides the main entrance to the temple-tower. This building, with living area spread on three sides, buttresses the temple-tower on the fourth side, with an open courtyard in the middle. This palace building is covered with pent roofing, having wooden planks as the covering material. On the left of it is a tower-temple, which enshrines an image of the goddess Bhimakali. Originally, this tower had seven storeys. However the top two storeys suffered extensive damage under the Kangra Earthquake of CE 1905, and those had to be pulled down during the reign of Raja Padam Singh (CE 1914-1947) of the erstwhile Bushahr state. Now only five storeys have remained. Raja Padam Singh also carried out extensive repairs to the tower and re-roofed it in graceful high pitched gabled roof of the original style, with a depressed pitch in the mid-length, but in place of the earlier wooden plank roofing, thin slates were provided. There is a narrow and partly enclosed balcony on the three exposed sides at the top floor of this tower. The flat and rustic later restoration work stands in stark contrast with the graceful and very rich ornamentation in the original portion inside the palace-n-temple-complex.

The inner portion of smaller secular building on the right (Guge Rani's palace) possessed until recently some of the original carvings on the wooden pillars and the wall-panels. The anthropo-



Guge Rani Castle at Sapni.

morphic and floral carvings, characterised by deep undercuts executed with fluent chiselling and dextrous modelling on those wall-panels reminisced about the classical mannerism of the earlier stone temples. The figural themes carved in deep relief on the wall-panels inside the palace of Guge Rani included Vishnu astride anthropomorphic *garud* and a standing Vishnu wearing *vaijayanti-mala* and holding his attributes in his four hands, all treated in classical diction. Both the images, set in a *vedika* of the plaited trefoiled border, were enclosed in the rectangular niches, with triangular crown. The whole treatment indicated a defused, but distinct influence of the Kashmiri art style. The richly-carved pillars with profuse floral ornamentation in the shaft, the gracefully carved oblong multi-element *ghat-pallav*, the prancing leonine figures over the stylised crocodiles – all this had been accomplished with deep undercuts in the three-dimensional form in such a manner as if the carver was handling stone block, and not wood. These carved elements were intact when I first saw them decades ago, but most of those are now extinct.

Certain panels were carved later at such a juncture when the classical mannerism in woodcarving was overtaken by the degenerated folk style. The wall-panels, one depicting the ten-armed Durga standing before the galloping lion, and the other of

Mahishasurmardini, are of that phase. Although, the carver has attempted to replicate the classical style, yet the stylistic degeneration is very much evident. These should have been executed in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, when, after a treaty between the ruler of Guge (in Western Tibet) and Raja Kehari Singh (CE 1639-1696) of Bushahr state – a matrimonial relationship between the two was established and a princess of Guge was married off to Kehari Singh. Since the Guge Rani (princess of Guge) preferred to live in the cooler environs of Kinnaur, the outer building of the castle-temple was converted into her residence. Hence, it came to be called as the 'palace of Guge Rani'.

From the continuous cushion moulding of the original planning at the plinth level, it may be suggested that the whole complex was embellished with woodcarvings done in the classical style. Those carved wooden elements were damaged due to the natural process of decaying and human callousness. In the recent instance, many carved wooden members of the structure were destroyed, when this building was converted into a primary school.

The religious themes of carving would indicate that the complex was originally designed as a temple for the goddess Bhimakali. It may be hazardous to fix the date of construction of this monument for want of definite evidence. However, the style of carvings of about 10<sup>th</sup> century temple-complexes at Chamba and Brahmaur may particularly be of help in this regard. In case we leave a period of about couple of centuries for the change over from the stone-based architecture to the wood-based one, we may provisionally assign a date of the 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> century to the Sapri temple-complex. It may be assumed that during the intervening period, the ornamental devices of the stone temples were being replicated technically and stylistically in wood, as may be evident from the woodcarving of Sapri temple-complex.

The strategic location of this temple-complex on the cliff attracted an attack by the Gurkhas during their invasion and occupation of Bushahr kingdom between CE 1810 and 1815. However, that attack was repulsed by the people effectively by using a naïve and primitive stratagem, called *ddhing* in local parlance. They hurled volleys of massive boulders and rocks over the enemy positions

in the manner of Roman catapult by releasing them with tremendous force from the tall deodar trees bent in the opposite direction by pulling them with sturdy ropes. The arrows, used by the Gurkhas in that action, were retrieved from the tree-trunks. Those are believed now to be kept in village Punang near Tapri.

This magnificent castle-temple, as it stands today in its stoic grandeur, is a fine example of the indigenous stone-n-timber architecture. The high-rising meticulously plumbed walls are not more than 50 centimetre thick. However, being well-bonded into a sturdy four-walled structure with sturdy wooden frames (*cheols*) of deodar *larje* (beams), the tower is perfectly monolithic. The square-cut honeycombed windows provided in the tall structure not only ensure air and defused light into the interiors, but these also provide facility for vigil.

Interestingly, the Kamru Castle in Baspa valley, the castle-temple of Sapni and the Bhimakali temple at Sarahan in Shimla district form a trio of the tower-type temples in the Satluj valley. Among these, none of the former two are the free-standing pure tower-type structures, but the third one is. The Kamru Castle may be the earliest in the group, followed by the castle-temple of Sapni. The Bhimakali temple at Sarahan is the latest one.

### Labrang Castle

The term *labrang* in the local dialect means a temple dedicated to an autochthonous deity, as opposed to *lha-khang*, i.e., the house of a classical deity, especially Buddhist. Obviously, the towering Labrang Castle might have enshrined an idol of a local native deity *Thunthun Gyelpo* on the top floor. However, presently there is no image in it. The lower floors might have been used as the residence of local *tthakaras* or *tthakurs* and for garrisoning, etc. It must have commanded a very dominant position in the area, hence the name of village after the fort. Although, this may be a conjecture, but quite logical one, because such towering structures have been used in that manner almost everywhere from Afghanistan to Nepal during the medieval times. Labrang also might have remained such stronghold. However, Rahul says something different about it. According to him, *labrang* means the palace of lama or a king.<sup>20</sup>

According to the local tradition, this castle was built by the Pandav. We come across such tradition almost everywhere in the Himalayan interiors. We ought to believe it as the metaphoric truth to suggest that the monument is old beyond the folk memory. In any case, this castle must have remained once an important strategic place for the security of surrounding villages against the marauders. As has been noted elsewhere, the *khoond* tradition had been rampant in this trans-Himalayan area and the antagonistic *khoonds* have been fighting and plundering villages here even on slightest provocation. According to one tradition, this castle was built against the Bhotia plunderers. That tradition also tells that the castle was linked with an underground water source. However, no such evidence could be found here to affirm the local belief.

The traditional Hindustan-Tibet road passed close to the castle, whenever the villagers, traders and other travellers feared attack on them, they used to take shelter in the castle.

I happened to see the Labrang Castle for the first time on 16<sup>th</sup> June 1976. I had reached Spillo village by a jeep a day before. The road beyond Spillo was severely damaged for the vehicular traffic. Therefore, for rest of my journey to Lëh, I was required to trek. I stayed at Spillo for the night so that I could start early next day for onward journey. Staying at Spillo proved very rewarding: I accidentally noticed interesting drawings or paintings on the wall of a house of one Sarv Shopal. It was a pleasant surprise for me, for wall decoration of any kind is something rare in the trans-Himalayan interior. However, casual symbolic drawings are made on the walls in upper Kinnaur on the eve of *Losar* festival, as noted in the 7<sup>th</sup> chapter. Those drawings at Shopal's house attracted my notice for the themes depicted in them.

In one of the paintings, the *goontths* (the trans-Himalayan ponies) were very realistically depicted in a playful mood on the mud-coated wall with the locally available ochre earth. The *goontths* play a very important role in the economy of trans-Himalayan region. People care for them much more than what they do for themselves, which fact is subtly reflected in this drawing. In the other drawing, three *churus* were drawn. One of the *churus* had heavy udder to suggest that it has given birth to a calf. The young calf was sucking mother's udder. Some pots containing butter and

milk were shown below *churus*. On one side, curd was shown being churned in skin bags, with heaps of butter shown alongside.

A steep ascent from Spillo led me to village Labrang. On the saddle above the village is the Labrang Castle, standing in the melancholic oblivion on the side of a footpath that descends to village Kanam. Close to the castle, there is a small *lha-khang* of *hJam-dpal dByangs* (Manjushri Manjughosh). Although, I was impulsively attracted by the nostalgic charm of this massive structure, yet the constraint of time did not permit its detailed study. Therefore, I was again at the Labrang Castle on 9<sup>th</sup> September 1977, this time to study it in detail. However, before we study the castle, let me narrate an interesting incident.

Near the castle, there is a small temple of a local autochthonous deity, named *Chhakoling Dambar*. This deity has embraced Buddhism to the extent that no animal sacrifice is now offered to him; otherwise he continues to be a traditional god of terrific disposition. That day the god, fully attired and installed on his *rath*, was found seated on an open platform under the bright sun, with nobody around. I felt puzzled to see that and probed around to find someone attending him, but none was to be found. I spent considerable time at the castle, but could find none around attending the deity. Having finished my work, I descended to village Kanam, where I found the local deity of Kanam – *Dabala Devta* – kept hostage in a house of an ailing person until he cured the patient. In the village, I learnt that *Chhakoling Dambar* has been left alone in the sun under 'punishment.' He had been taken to the house of some patient so that he could affect cure to him and also to seek rain, but the deity did not oblige his votaries. When prayers failed, the punishment was only the way left. Well, those are the ways, the traditional gods function everywhere.

The castle, as it now stands, is a tall, but dilapidated and much weathered structure. Standing on an elevated plinth of solid stone masonry, this castle had seven storeys. Its topmost storey was pulled lest the loose wooden part of that floor damage the adjoining school building. With six floors now intact, this structure still stands about 19 metres tall.

The castle is laid out in a near quadratic formation, measuring almost 8.50 × 8.50 metres externally, with front and side walls

made of 50 centimetres thick timber-bonded stone masonry. The back wall is 75 centimetres thick. Massive deodar wood binders have been inserted after three-four stone courses of rubble stones. Each floor of the castle has similar arrangement of internal space, having two rooms on the back, each measuring  $3.50 \times 4.25$  metres. Each of these have independent door from the fronting rooms. In the front portion, there is an oblong room on the left. From this room, accesses to the upper floors are also provided. The room on the right is nearly squarish, measuring  $2.50 \times 2.30$  metres. Both these fronting rooms are interconnected and also provide access to the rooms in the back. None of these dimensions is exact, because neither the walls are of uniform thickness nor the corners are right-angled. There are projected balconies on all the four sides on the upper three floors. Small peepholes have been provided on the outer walls on all sides for surveillance and hurling missiles on the intruders. The roof of the castle is flat, made of thick rammed earth.

A massive wooden ladder leads one to the open platform, from where the main entrance opens into the oblong room on the left. It is told that in the olden times, this ladder was removed in emergency so that no enemy could enter the castle. How that could be done, is anybody's guess, for the ladder is too heavy and long to be removed or lifted.

### **Moorang Castle**

I was at Moorang Castle on 14<sup>th</sup> September 1976 for full day for a queer reason: not to study the temple but under detention of the paramilitary unit that had temporarily garrisoned the castle for an exercise. That was the time, when the only access to the village Moorang and its castle was through a rickety ropeway across the Satluj. Standing on the edge of HT road on the opposite bank, the Moorang Castle towering stoically in the desolate aloofness on a local mound spontaneously attracted my attention. I took many photographs of the castle, set in the rugged surrounding, but that did not satiate my desire to study it closely. So I rushed down to the ropeway to get closer to the castle, not knowing even faintly that my every movement was being closely watched through

binoculars by somebody positioned in the castle. Exploring the area around, I gradually advanced up to the main entrance of the castle, but the moment I stepped on the threshold, two rifles fitted with bayonets crossed before me. Next moment I saw two guards obstructing my way.

On inquiry, I was candidly told that I have committed an offence of photographing the paramilitary installation and that I was under detention. They led me up to the officer-in-charge of the unit, sitting in a bunker at the foot of castle. One of them was holding a pair of binoculars that made everything obvious for me: the castle was temporarily under the control of paramilitary, and it had established its unit headquarters at the castle. I was told that an exercise was going on in Kinnaur, and that they are searching the area for the 'infiltrators and spies of the enemy force'. I was suspected to be a secret agent of the enemy force and was subjected to thorough inquiry. They fed and treated me very well, but impounded my camera and the exposed film rolls. My all efforts to convince them about my objective went futile. I was told that I have to remain in the bunker until the conclusion of exercise at 5 p.m.

I was instantaneously reminded of the similar ordeal on my way to Chhitkul a month earlier. As I started from the rest-house at Sangla to Chhitkul with a heavy luggage on my back, two young and educated local women followed me. After passing some distance, they asked me to give my luggage to them to carry. I declined the offer, but started chatting with them. They told me that an exercise was going on in the entire Kinnaur area for one month and that they were the 'trainee spies' on the mission of locating the positions of the paramilitary force in the area. They again requested me to give my luggage to them so that they could accompany me as my porters and, thus, escape detection. I felt thrilled at the idea and gave my luggage to both of them.

As we reached an improvised crossing over a nullah near Rakchham, I saw a contingent of troops coming from the opposite direction. We came face to face with each other, the officer-in-charge exchanged pleasantries with me. It was all fine until the officer asked me about the two young women following me. I told, they were my porters, but the next moment I saw both of them jumping into the cliff and disappearing, leaving us all flabbergasted. The



situation became very clear for me and to save the occasion, I told the officer that the women of Kinnaur are very shy and they feel scared in front of strangers, especially from the strangers-in-uniform. Fearing so many troops advancing, they opted to protect themselves by jumping down into the bushes.

On the next turn, I stopped to look for them. However, they were nowhere to be found. Apprehensive as I was about my luggage, I continued forward, but as I reached Rakchham, both of them appeared from nowhere, very much relieved. They handed over the luggage to me, but politely expressed their annoyance to me for having talked with the officer. They ruefully said, "Had he suspected us, we would have been severely reprimanded."

Standing stoically on an isolated elevated feature, this castle is now in a very poor state of conservation, having suffered the vagaries of nature now for many centuries. The layout, architecture and construction style of this castle are almost identical to that of the castle at Labrang, but for the heights. Both these castles might have been built at the same time during the medieval times. This castle is a 7.50 metres tall structure, comprising three storeys. The massive castle stands on a solid stone plinth that measures 5.25 metres on one side and 3.50 metres on the other.

The castle is laid out in a quadratic formation, measuring 9.00 × 9.00 metres externally, with about half metre thick stone masonry walls. Massive timber binders have been inserted after three-four courses of rubble stones. Each floor has similar arrangement of its internal space, having two rooms on the back. The room on the left measures approximately 4.25 × 4.75 and the one on the right measures about 3.25 × 4.75 metres. In the front portion, there is an oblong room that provides access to the rooms in the back. None of these dimensions is exact, because neither the walls are of uniform thickness nor the corners are right-angled. A projected balcony is provided on the top floor possibly to keep vigil on the movements of interlopers around the castle. The roof of this castle is flat, made of thick rammed earth. A massive wooden ladder leads one to the main entrance that opens into the oblong room. This ladder could be pulled inside in emergency so that no intruder could enter the castle.

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# 12

## TOURISM POTENTIAL

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### DESTINATIONS AND ACCESS

Kinnaur is exotic, enchanting and enthralling land in many ways. Nature has lavishly bestowed it with some of its choicest bounties – floral and faunal extravaganza, lush green and snow-crested ranges, striated and stark geological formations of myriad hues and altitudes and the green oasis of irrigated fields amidst the arid wilderness. Besides, its inhabitants have adorned it through generations with exotic arts, handicrafts and architecture, steeped deeply in the nostalgic aroma and colourful lifestyle. Obviously, since ages past, people of various ethnicities, diverse persuasions and varied interests have been drawn towards this legendary land of umpteen charms. Be it a trekker or a hiker, mountaineer or nature lover, peace seeker or pilgrim, artist or scientist, it beckons all. It is a blessed land of endless interests, pleasant surprises and thrills for all well-intentioned visitors.

Most part of Kinnaur lies in the trans-Himalayan arid and arctic cold-desert, where neither the earth nor the sky is like that of ours. However, those who love adventure, trekking, hiking or the nostalgic aroma of history, it is simply a paradise with innumerable attractions. Kinnaur is an all-weather destination for the daring visitors, despite the snowy and extremely cold winters. For, winter is the most active time in Kinnaur, when people indulge in festivities. However, for those who fear cold, even summer is cold and

rather drippy, because of the monsoons. Therefore, one should go well-prepared for such inclemency. The best time to visit Kinnaur is late spring or early autumn – before or after the monsoons. It is advisable to time your trekking visit between April and May or September and mid-October, when seasonal fruits are also plentifully available. For the anthropologists and sociologists that is the most opportune time to visit, for they can have the first-hand experience of the lifestyle of the people. Nature here opens up in innumerable forms and hues all around the year.

Starting from Shimla, one should not miss visiting the famous wooden temple of *Maishur* at Sungra that we have studied in detail in the previous chapter. It is conveniently accessible by making a short detour from Bhabanagar, on the National Highway No. 22 (Hindustan-Tibet road), towards Nichar. This all-wooden temple, located seven kilometres from Bhabanagar towards Nichar, is a typical example of the wood-based Himalayan temple architecture.

If one likes, he may continue his journey to Nichar, known as *Nalch* in vernacular parlance, that is, a village of dancers. How imaginative this name is, may be known from the Indian classical traditions that defines the legendary Kinnars as the celestial dancers. Situated on a gentle mountain slope, surrounded by the lush green and thick deodar forests at an elevation of about 2,000 metres above sea level, Nichar is a scattered village. It commands a magnificent view of the snow-capped mountain ranges around and the deep Satluj gorge below. This place is well-known for its ancient Ukha Devi (Usha Devi) temple. Ukha Devi is the presiding deity of Nichar and the villages around. It is only a one-day destination. One can comfortably stay here in the government rest-house, but to be sure about accommodation, one must obtain in advance booking from the local forest or PWD authorities.

### Exploring Sangla Valley

Back to Bhabanagar, going upstream along the Satluj, the next notable destination in Kinnaur is the famous Sangla valley. To reach this destination, one has to detour eastwards from Karcham, following the upstream course of Baspa river that forms this enchanting valley. Tucked away in the southeastern part of lower

Kinnaur, this valley is also known as the Baspa valley after the name of river that forms it. Sangla valley is among the most beautiful valleys in the Himalay. Stretching for 95 kilometres from east to west, the Sangla valley is drained by the Baspa river, which meets the Satluj at Karcham. The 18-km long stretch of this valley in the head-reaches is quite narrow, with slopes on both sides graciously clad with the mighty deodar, *chilgoza* and *bhojpatr* trees. However, further downwards, the landscape opens up and widens into an enchanting vale, with pretty wooden houses situated widely apart on verdant slopes and scenic glades. The Baspa river flows between the orchards and through the picturesque villages, with houses neatly apart. The lavish woodwork done in most of these houses is very artistic and fascinating. Chhitkul, Sangla and Kamru are the ancient and interesting villages in this valley.

### *Chhitkul*

Chhitkul, the last and highest inhabited village of this valley, is forty-five kilometres away from Karcham. It is an ancient village of wooden houses and two forts – the *Chhota Kila* and *Bara Kila*, one newly-built Buddhist temple and three ancient temples of the goddess Matthi – the presiding goddess of the village. As the



Matthi Devi temple at Chhitkul.

tradition holds, the oldest of these temples was built by a man from Garhwal about five hundred years ago. According to the *chironing* of this goddess, which her *grokch* utters in the divine afflatus, she, after having roamed about from Vrindavan to Tibet, came to Mone. There her husband, Badrinath was guarding the throne of Bushahr. Thereafter, she went about several places in lower Kinnaur, where her husband or her nephews were guarding different realms. Ultimately, she found a permanent home at Chhitkul, taking care of all the seven realms in the valley.<sup>1</sup> This legend may suggest that Matthi was the presiding goddess of Sangla valley.

### *Kamru*

Kamru is among the oldest villages of Kinnaur. It represents an intriguing blend of native, Hindu and Buddhist traditions. The traditional name of this village was *Mone* or *Mone-pra* or *Mone-gorang*. How it came to be known as Kamru, is told in an interesting legend. According to that legend, the name of presiding goddess of this valley was changed from Matthi to *Kumukhya*, i.e., *Kamakhya* by the founders of Bushahr kingdom at Mone. They also changed the name of this capital-village from Mone to Kamru, i.e., *Kamrup* after the new name of goddess. Kamru is an interesting nostalgic village on a local hillock dominated by the towering Kamru Castle. On the outskirts of this village lies the saffron farm. The saffron produced here is considered better than the one in Pampore, Kashmir.

### *Sangla*

Sangla is the principal village of Sangla valley, situated about 20 kilometres from Karcham and about 230 kilometres from Shimla, from where it takes about 10 hours to reach. This village is well-connected by regular bus service from Shimla and Reckong Peo. This populous village, situated on the right side of the Baspa is famous for its idyllic location at 2,621 metres from the MSL. With ample accommodation available in private hotels, government rest-houses and tourist lodges, it is a favourite destination for the tourists. It is also famous for freshwater angling.

## TREKKING CIRCUITS

If one wants to have full advantage of his visit to Kinnaur, it is only by trekking. Good campsites exist in Kinnaur at various places, especially in the Sangla valley, where, most of them are close to Karchham. Further, in most of the larger villages in Kinnaur, forest and PWD rest-houses, guest-houses and small hotels are also available. These are reasonably comfortable. These shelters may be a good option for those who are scared of sleeping under the stars for any reason. In the smaller villages, you may be lucky enough to find hospitable villagers, who may spare a room for a night, but it is better to pitch a tent at safer place than to stay in private houses. It is better to follow this golden rule while travelling in Kinnaur or elsewhere in the Himalayan interiors. It is generally essential that trekking jaunts are undertaken in groups, and never venture alone. It is advisable to have an experienced guide with you, especially in the wild and rugged treks. He may not only lead you safely in the unknown and unfamiliar trails, but also assist you in getting permits and supplies.

**Sangla Valley Trek**

This trekking route follows the course of Baspa river, from Sangla to Chhitkul through Rakcham, thus covering the entire valley. Starting the trek at Sangla village, the legendary castle village of Kamru is about a forty-minute walk. From Kamru, one has to trek on upstream course of the Baspa to Rakcham for about fourteen kilometres. There is a beautiful multi-tiered wooden temple decorated with fine wood carvings. The village has reasonably good facility for the night halt. Next day, one can start early morning to cover the last leg of twenty-five kilometres from Rakcham to Chhitkul, where one can pitch a tent on the campsite or stay in the PWD rest-house.

Chhitkul is the base for the Kinnar Kailash *parikrama*. A trekker can either go further on the Kinnar Kailash trek, or walk another four-kilometre trek to Nagasthi, the last Indian post before the Tibetan border, provided you possess proper documents. The foreigners are not allowed beyond Chhitkul without a special permit.

### *Kinnar Kailash Yatra*

The holy peak of Kinnar Kailash (*Raldang*) (6,473 metres), towering over the Satluj river, is the holiest peaks of Kinnaur. Performing *parikrama* around it is regarded an act of religious merit by the people of Kinnaur and other places. The more than 200 kilometres long annual Kinnar Kailash *Yatra* is an important pilgrimage for thousands of devout Hindus and Buddhists. This holy *yatra*, also known as the *Kinnar Kailash Parikrama*, normally starts on the *Janmashtami* day (around end of August) from the Buddhist temple at village Poari. Following the clockwise route, it proceeds through Purbani, Ribba, Rispa, Thangi, Charang-la, Lalanti, and enters Sangla valley at Chhitkul and proceeding along to Mastrang, Rakcham and Sangla, it reaches again at Poari, where the pilgrimage is consummated.

However, for the avid trekkers, the Kinnar Kailash Circuit, starts at Moorang and passing through Thangi, Rahtak, Charang-la, Chhitkul, Sangla, Kamru, Shang, Brua and terminating at Karcham, is a lifetime adventure. The trek is best accomplished in July or August and it takes about a week to complete. It may be advisable to engage an experienced guide along and also carry adequate supplies and equipments, because the trek passes through the wild and uninhabited areas.

Although it makes a starts at Moorang, a village situated on the left bank of the Satluj northwest of Chhitkul, yet the actual trekking starts from village Thangi, a short distance from Moorang, along the gushing waters of the Turung Gad. Moorang is a large village, having an ancient castle and a monastery. The place is connected by road from Reckong Peo, the district headquarters of Kinnaur. From Thangi, one walks up the valley for about twelve kilometres to reach the village Rahtak. There is no staying facility at this small village and one has to pass the night under the stars or pitch a tent to get relaxing sleep and get fresh for the next day's tough ascent. The next day, one has to climb the 5,266-metre high Charang-la. After Charang-la, the trail dips into the Sangla valley. Following the downstream course of Baspa river one heads towards Chhitkul and walks down to Sangla village, stopping en route at Kamru. From Kamru, another trail leads via Shang and



Brua through Karcham up to the Kinnar Kailash itself. The trek up the mountain takes a day or more, depending upon ones physical and mental condition.

### *Sangla Valley–Har-ki-Dun Trek*

Besides the aforementioned treks within the jurisdiction of Kinnaur district, there are many others, opening eastwards to the destinations in Uttarkashi district of Uttarakhand. Among these, Sangla valley–Har-ki-Dun trek is favourite with the adventure-loving trekkers. This trek is also known as the Chhitkul-Doaria-Zupika Gad-Borsu pass-Har-ki-Dun circuit, for it actually takes off from Chhitkul. Starting from Chhitkul, one follows a rugged and perilous trek along the upstream course of Baspa river up to a small hamlet, called Doaria. From Doaria, the trails leads right eastwards to Zupika Gad and then climbs up to Borsu pass around the Banderpoonch massif. Descending from the celestial heights, one heads towards the beautiful glen of Har-ki-Dun in a couple of days.

While trekking on the inter-district routes, it is advisable that an experienced guide must accompany you, because not only the treks are arduous, but these are tricky and deceptive too. He may also help you in the local arrangements, permits, etc. It is easy to get confused in the foggy and thick forests, and once you are taken in by the mysterious ambiance of nature on these 'untrodden' treks, only grit and providence can help.

Having visited the Sangla valley, now it is time to return to Karcham. From Karcham, following the upstream course of Satluj river, we are now in the main valley. There are numerous places of interest in the main valley and the side valleys, like the Chini-Kalpa-Reckong Peo area, the heartland of Kinnaur, the castle villages of Moorang and Labrang, monastery villages at Kanam and Nako, and the ancient village of Poo. We have discussed all these and many more places in detail in various preceding chapters. However, there are many other treks in the main Satluj valley leading to various destinations within Kinnaur and to Kullu district and Spiti valley. The most fascinating among those trekking routes is the one that follows the fabled Hindustan-Tibet road.

*Trekking on the Fabled Hindustan-Tibet Road*

It may be apt to call the ancient Hindustan-Tibet road as the Wool Road, for it was essentially planned to link the wool-marts of Tibet with the Indian mainland, so that the fine Tibetan wool and fleece could be safely imported to the Indian markets. On this road, innumerable travellers journeyed from India to Tibet and Central Asia. Most of them have left very vivid account of their journeys in various travelogues. They also recorded their experience in the visitors' books of various rest-houses, where they stayed. All those visitors' books were preserved in those beautifully located two-roomed rest-houses. What could be their fate now, is anybody's guess. The fabled Wool Road was at best a bridal track, on which besides the pedestrians, the sure-footed *goonthees* could walk. This fascinating road started from Shimla, touched Narkanda in four stages, and moved forward to Rampur – the capital town of Bushahr kingdom. From Rampur, it ascended to Gaura and to Sarahan. Another road ran along the ridge from Narkanda via Khadralla, Bahali, Taklech, Daran Ghati and Sarahan. Thus, both the roads met at Sarahan. While the British officers preferred the Satluj valley route via Rampur, most of the game-seekers, trekkers and explorers preferred the ridge route.

From Sarahan, the road passed through various important villages like a fine lace throughout Kinnaur district. Thus, beyond Sarahan, the stages on that road were Chaura, Tranda, Ponda, Nichar, Tapri, Urni, Rogi, Chini (Kalpa), Pangi, Akpa, Jangi, Kanam, Poo, Namgia and to the border village of Shipki. Across Shipki-la is Tibet. Nothing has changed significantly on this road, for the present motorable HT road (National Highway No. 22) runs deep in the valley along the Satluj, leaving the old Hindustan-Tibet road at the mercy of elements, except for the occasional repairs by PWD and local bodies. Therefore, it still has all the nostalgic charms and adventures for the nature-loving trekkers.

Among the other notable treks, mentioned may be made of the Chaura-Rupi-Bhaba trek that girdles the Rup-Bhaba wildlife sanctuary, and the Pangi-Kashang Kanda-Lippa-Giabong-Hango-Leo trek. For those, who are desirous of a detailed study of trekking routes in Kinnaur, I suggest a very fascinating and interesting book by Deepak Sanan and Dhanu Swadi.<sup>2</sup>

## CODE OF CONDUCT FOR TOURISTS

Kinnaur is a land of exotic grandeur. Its charismatic beauty beckons all. However, it certainly is not a place for those who like to seek enjoyment and pleasure at the cost of its sanctity – its natural grandeur, cultural and moral heritage, religious traditions and artistic and archaeological wealth.

To ensure that natural and cultural sanctity of this *dev bhumi* – the abode of gods – is maintained and respected, it is very essential that every visitor to this land must sincerely follow a moral code of conduct, and the 'system' must ensure that these mandates are not flouted. The fragile ecosystem and the cultural and moral heritage of Kinnaur have already suffered grievously the brunt of consumerist virus, for which the 'system' is equally responsible. That malady has already penetrated deeply in various ways in almost every aspect of public life here. In order to protect this *dev bhumi* against the vile consumerist temptation and the evils of so-called luxury tourism, it becomes imperative that the moral, religious and cultural mores of the land are respected. There is a dire need to accord priority to these values while encouraging tourism in this fragile and sensitive area.

To that end, it is extremely essential that each inhabitant of Kinnaur is made conscious of the beautiful and morally and culturally rich inheritance bequeathed to him by the nature and his ancestors. It is his moral and sacred duty to pass that splendid inheritance intact, if not in better form, on to the next generation. It should be strictly ensured that none for the trifling pecuniary benefit or any other extraneous consideration inflicts sacrilege to nature and culture of this land.

Kinnaur has already suffered enough damage in the past decades by way of environmental degradation, human callousness, and pillage. It is time to reverse that pernicious process. It is indeed unfortunate that due to the relaxation of 'inner line restriction' for boosting tourism, the incidents of theft of antiquities have increased in this area, and more often than not, connivance of the locals with the outsiders has been the *modus operandi*. To prevent such activity effectively, there is a dire need for public awareness. Besides, there is an urgent need to properly and systematically

register all the portable objects of value and antiquity in this area.

There is a need for adopting a holistic approach to develop healthy tourism, integrating all traditional aspects of art and culture. People engaged in tourism industry should have adequate knowledge of the history, folklore, art and culture of the region so that a visitor to Kinnaur may be able to have the nostalgic feel of his immediate visual experience. Appropriate orientation courses for the people engaged in tourism activities may be of great help in this regard.

It should be ensured that the visitors to this sensitive interior are well intentioned. As far as possible, no individual tourist, except those on specific academic or scientific missions, should be allowed into the interiors without an authorised tourist guide. Preferably, group tours should be organised by authorised tourist guides and accredited tourist agencies only. This will not only help maintain the sanctity of the area, but also ensure safety of the tourists.

It may be ensured that no tourist overstays at a particular place in the interior without valid reason. The pernicious fallout of such overstay and even colonization is now glaringly evident at Malana in Parvati valley of Kullu and several other places in the interiors of Himachal Pradesh, where freewheeling tourists, native and foreigners have normally been seen staying in tented colonies and private houses, polluting public moral and lifestyle in many ways. There is a need to ensure constant vigil on the isolated and far-flung religious places and other monuments. It is unfortunate that in a mad rush for economic affluence, grievous injuries have been inflicted on the fragile biosphere of Kinnaur. Nature redeems itself in inimitable manner when man outstretches his lust to encroach upon it.

For a tourist, Kinnaur is one of the favourite all time destinations in Himachal Pradesh, with comfortable boarding and lodging facilities available in *dak-bungalows*, rest-houses, hotels and guest-houses even in the interiors. A tourist should have no boarding problems, but he should avoid staying in unauthorised accommodation.

Before venturing into the interiors, a tourist must seek relevant information and instructions from the tourism information centres.

It is advisable to keep a woollen outfit handy while in the high altitude interiors. These places are generally cold even during the summer.

Those suffering from blood pressure may suffer from altitude sickness. Therefore, he should not venture into the high altitude destinations without a helping hand and proper medical kit. A traditionally tried prescription: smelling crushed onion helps overcoming high altitude drowsiness. It may be beneficial for the tourist to check in at the local police post on arrival. That may ensure complete security and timely assistance to him.

Photography is normally permitted everywhere in Kinnaur. However, one should seek proper information and permission from the local authorities to cover any risk. Although, there is no monument protected by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) in Kinnaur, yet for photography in the monuments protected by ASI, advance permission is mandatory. Even if the permission is granted, one should not use flashlight or ultraviolet illuminant in monasteries and temples with painted walls. The ultraviolet radiation is injurious to the colours. In some religious places, there may be restrictions on photography on religious considerations, as at Chandika temple at Kothi and the monasteries at Ropa and Nako, where I also encountered problem in photographing. In such places, photography should be avoided in deference to the religious sentiments of the locals.

The people of Kinnaur have deep faith in their gods, rituals and traditions. Therefore, it should be ensured that the sentiments of people are respected. A golden rule is that nothing that hurts the feeling of the local should be done.

Tourists must ensure that they do not spill garbage in open areas. These have already inflicted grievous damage to the environment. Therefore, the visitors must carry such material with them to be dumped in the specified bins or pits. It must not be disposed off in the open. This precaution is mandatory in Himachal Pradesh for all types of non-biodegradable waste, especially the plastic containers and bags. Ironically, no man has climbed the sacred Kinnar Kailash (*Raldang*) peak, but the discarded plastic bags left behind while performing *parikrama*, swept by the winds, have reached even there.

One should not carry any type of firearms in Kinnaur or other places in Himachal Pradesh. This region is as safe even in the open for the tourist as the bedroom of his home. The smokers should ensure that no burning matchstick or butt is thrown before it is thoroughly extinguished. Forest fires are very dreadful and damaging here.

The tourists carrying combustible material with them should ensure its safety. It may be permissible to use dry jungle wood for open-fire at the camping sites for cooking and warming purposes. However, in no case should it be left unguarded. It should be ensured that the fire is thoroughly extinguished and the residue dumped in a pit before leaving the site. A conscientious tourist leaves the site clean.

It is advisable to travel in public transport or in the authorised private vehicles. These are good and easily available anywhere in Himachal Pradesh. However, if one desires to drive one's own vehicle, it is essential that one carries adequate spares, since service stations may not be easily found in the interiors. Also, keep a good stock of fuel and lubricants.

Above all, Kinnaur is beautiful and culturally very rich land. It is the moral duty of the beneficiaries of tourism to ensure all safeguards to maintain it for the posterity. A tourist is regarded here as *atithi dev* – the honoured guest, but an *atithi* also has his *maryada* – the guest's code of conduct. If he follows that, he will find Kinnaur a home away from his home.

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# 13

## DYNAMICS OF CHANGE

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Now, having come so far, it is a time to retrospect. Kinnaur has passed through different phases of history right from the nascent days of history to the present time. Coming out of the ethereal imaginary of legends, it has witnessed many upheavals in the past, most of which still remain shrouded in mystery. The systematic study of the folklore and popular traditions may bring to light many obscure niches of history of this region. This is important too, for this area is still relatively protected from noxious influences of market culture and the virus of cosmopolitanism. Therefore, we may expect enough unpolluted source material here not only of historical interest, but also of anthropological and sociological merit. Concerted and timely efforts are needed to that end, for the winds of change are blowing fast in this area.

With the coming of large national and multinational companies, the fragile natural resources of Kinnaur have been ruthlessly exploited on the pretext of 'scientific harnessing.' This attractive term may befool human beings, but cannot dupe the nature. The pernicious fallouts of the mega projects are now becoming glaringly manifest day in and day out: the environment of Kinnaur has suffered wholesale transformation. Symbiotic and complementary imperatives of development, that were envisaged during the earlier Plans, have been discarded to encourage mega projects and to placate big companies at the cost of environmental degradation and public health. Of course, the wheel of change cannot be rever-

sed, but it can certainly be reoriented by adopting a pragmatic, viable and sustainable approach in formulating developmental priorities, with due regard for the traditional value system and enterprises. The pace may be slow, but it will surely be beneficial to the environment and people of Kinnaur.

The 'Kinnaura' is one of the 'scheduled tribes' of Himachal Pradesh. That status was granted to it so that the people could get certain special facilities and opportunities to be at par with the mainstream culture, and at the same time could conserve their traditional cultural mores, their arts and crafts. To that end, it was postulated that no non-Kinnaura can acquire land or bona fide residential status in Kinnaur. That arrangement worked absolutely fine for decades, for most of the outsiders were government servants, who stayed in this district only for small duration of their postings. However, with the introduction of mega projects, huge workforce was imported from all parts of the country. People from various walks of life from many parts of the country virtually swarmed into this district in search of jobs and for business. While, the outsiders living in the district on time-bound contractual assignments may move out of district after completion of their assignments, but what about those immigrants, who are engaged in numerous private vocations. Many of them have been pursuing different private trade and business activities and some of them are very well-set and established at various places. To make their stay secure in this district, they have even established clandestine links and relationship with the local people. In one of my visits to Kinnaur, I happened to wait for the bus in a roadside *dhaba* run by a middle-aged couple. I asked for a cup of tea from the '*lala ji*'. He prepared tea for me and asked the women to take it to me. While sipping tea, I curiously asked the women to which place she belonged. "I am a local woman from the nearby village, but the *lala ji* is from Ambala", she innocently replied. That further aroused my interest and quizzed her further about who the *lala ji* was. He is my husband, was the straight reply. May be that *lala ji* has another wife at his native place, but who cares.

That was not a solitary example; most of the non-Kinnaura businessmen have contrived such covert ways to exploit the situation. If the situation goes unchecked, not only it may disturb the



ethno-historical continuity and pervert the socio-cultural sanctity of Kinnaur, but may also cause demographic imbalance and create various other complex problems.

In the age, when the advanced countries like USA are dismantling their dams, and the concept of large dams is being seriously challenged, especially in highly tectonic regions of the Himalay, there is a dire need for the complete and in-depth review of the policy for sustainable approach to the dam and tunnel building activities in the fragile Himalayan interiors. In India, Bhakra and Tehri could be good case studies for comprehensive cost-benefits analyses and future sustainability against the high silt-deposition rates; besides equitable water and hydropower sharing policies between the upstream and downstream. Kinnaur bleeds to enrich the industries in the mainland. There is a need that the beneficiaries in the mainland must compensate for the cultural, spiritual, material and environmental losses of Kinnaur by initiating and encouraging activities that may be conducive for the sustainable spiritual, cultural and moral uplift and compatible with the contemporary scenario. Kinnaur has suffered enormously in these spheres.

Further, with the invasion of consumerist culture, hyped by the modern information and publicity network, cosmopolitan culture is silently penetrating to the remotest corner of the district. The finer and wholesome nuances of the traditional lifestyle are the immediate casualty of that incursion. There is an urgent and conscious need to keep them up while imbibing best of the modern. Local arts and handicrafts have suffered in quality in the craze for quantity to feed the market. That has resulted into debasing of public taste. Under these extraneous pressures, how far the people of Kinnaur shall be able to hold their identity, may be difficult to visualise. Surely, Kinnaur is changing very fast, faster than any other place around.

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